

PART I
THE AGNICAYANA RITUAL

Chapter I. INTRODUCTION

THE FIRST PART of this book deals with the Agnicayana ritual and provides background for a description of its 1975 performance.

This first section is based partly upon classical texts, including discussions of these texts by modern interpreters. The Agnicayana, as described in such texts, should be distinguished from the Agnicayana as performed by Nambudiri brahmins in 1975. The Nambudiri performance is not revivalistic and is therefore not based upon a scholarly study of ancient texts. It is based upon the Nambudiri tradition, handed down from teacher to pupil and from father to son, largely orally, but with the occasional assistance of manuscript manuals in Malayalam. Because it represents a living tradition, there are discrepancies between the tradition and the texts.

Throughout this first part I shall refer to the 1975 performance only occasionally, because the performance will be documented in other parts of the book. Relevant portions from some of the most important classical ritual manuals will be given, in text and translation, in Part IV.

Chapter 2 of Part I will introduce the texts and the hierarchy of rituals. This chapter is full of names and demands some effort on the part of the reader. It introduces the roles of the *dramatis personae* (who will themselves be introduced in Part II) and is therefore an indispensable part of the volume. The Vedas themselves are important primarily because they provide the recitations for the ritual. In the *R̥gveda* there are numerous references to ritual, but they are too fragmentary to permit its reconstruction. The *Yajurveda* is the ritual Veda par excellence, but it does not provide systematic descriptions of ritual. In the later Vedic period, roughly from 700 to 300 B.C., a number of specialized manuals were compiled that provide a general classification of *śrauta* rituals and a minute description of each of them. Some of these texts are manuals of Vedic schools, which are preserved in the Nambudiri tradition. Texts and translations of relevant portions are provided in Part IV of this book. Other manuals belong to schools that have long been extinct. N. Tsuji treats one of these in Part III (pages 135–160). Chapter 2 of Part I will first survey the textual sources, and then provide an overview of the *śrauta* rituals described in these sources, indicating the position of the Agnicayana.

Chapter 3 of Part I will provide a bird's-eye view of the Agnicayana based upon the classical texts. A more detailed and illustrated description of episodes of the 1975 performance will be given in Part II. This is further documented by the description of records and films in Part V.

Chapter 4 of Part I deals with some of the traditional interpretations of the Agnicayana. The ritual manuals provide only descriptions, and presuppose that the performers were familiar with the meaning of the rites. Other

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portions of the Vedic literature deal with the meaning of ritual and of rituals. The Brāhmaṇas in particular are devoted to ritual interpretation and speculation, but the numerous, not always consistent, and sometimes fanciful interpretations that these works provide show clearly that, even at this early period, any meaning many episodes may have had was already lost. The texts themselves declare that "the gods love what is out of sight" (*paro'kṣapriyā devāḥ*: Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 6.1.1.2, etc.). Obscurity kindles the imagination. The ritual speculations of the later Vedic literature lead to the beginnings of Indian philosophy, and stand at the origin of many developments in later Hinduism.

Chapter 5, the longest chapter of Part I, discusses the origin and significance of the Agnicayana. This chapter has been divided into several sections in an attempt to bring some order to the vast amount of material. The origin of the Agnicayana takes us back almost to the dawn of civilization. When we come to later prehistoric times we face two distinct civilizations. On the one hand we have the materially simple culture of the Indo-Iranian nomads, who were wandering on the dry steppes of Inner Asia. On the other hand we know of a highly evolved city culture, which flourished, roughly at the same time, a thousand miles further south and on the other side of the formidable mountain ranges of the western Himalayas, in the fertile valleys of the upper Indus. It has been fashionable for some time to trace everything Indian that is not found in the earlier Vedas to this Indus civilization. I shall resist this temptation, because our knowledge of the Harappā culture, though extensive, is limited and one-sided, based as it is upon archaeological data and controversial seals. Yet it cannot be denied that there are numerous features of the Agnicayana that cannot be derived from the nomadic culture of the Indo-Iranian invaders.

Thapar, Parpola, Heesterman, and Seidenberg treat these early periods from different points of view in Part III of this book (in the second volume). I provide an analysis of ritual structure there. To introduce and supplement these chapters, I shall deal with Agni, fire, the Vedic nomads, Soma, the Cosmic Man, the altar, and naturally perforated stones in Chapter 5 of Part I.

Chapter 6 of Part I treats Vedic traditions among the Nambudiris, incorporating some material from my book *Nambudiri Veda Recitation* (1961). A long history, spanning almost twenty-five centuries, leads from the Vedic period to contemporary Nambudiri society. As regards the Vedic ritual, most of this history remains unwritten. Some definite but scattered information can be derived from epigraphical evidence, mostly from the medieval period. References in epic and literary works are numerous but are rarely specific. The picture gains precision only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when many of the śrauta rituals were already on the verge of extinction. Kashikar and Parpola will survey śrauta performances in recent times in Part III. For further information on the history of the Nambudiri community, see K. Kunjunni Raja, M.G.S. Narayanan, Kesavan Veluthat, M.R. Raghava Varier and others in Part III in the second volume.

Chapter 2. THE AGNICAYANA IN CLASSICAL VEDIC RITUAL

SOURCES

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF Vedic culture is, in the first place, derived from the four Vedas: the Ṛgveda (RV), a collection of poems, hymns, and invocations of deities, reflecting myths, rites, battles, and insights of many kinds; the Yajurveda (YV), verse and prose largely concerned with ritual; the Sāmaveda (SV), which consists mostly of parts of the Ṛgveda set to music; and the Atharvaveda (AV), a collection that is somewhat similar to the Ṛgveda, but that pays more attention to magic, and probably reflects a different stratum of society.

Each of these Vedas consists of several portions, the earliest of which is called *saṃhitā*. Like other concepts applied to the Vedas, this term emphasizes form more than content. The term *saṃhitā* means "conjunction, continuity" and refers to the continuous recitation of the text. In such continuous recitation, euphonic combinations (*sandhi*) apply between words, as in current speech. For example, *agnīḥ naḥ yajñām ūpa vetu* is recited as *agnīr no yajñām ūpa vetu*, "Agni, may he come to our ritual." At the same time, the rendering of the accent of a word might influence the pronunciation of the immediately preceding and following words.

The *saṃhitā* recitation contrasts with the *padapāṭha*, "word-for-word recitation," from *pada*, "word," in which sentences are decomposed into separate words. Such decomposition implies that the *sandhi* combinations are dissolved, and that the influence of the word accent is confined to the word itself. For example, in the above illustration, the *padapāṭha* is: *agnīḥ / naḥ / yajñām / ūpa / vetu*. The *padapāṭha*, available for each of the *saṃhitā* texts, preserves the earliest linguistic analysis of these texts.

The word "text," which we tend to use in such contexts, is in fact inappropriate: we are not dealing with books that were written down, but with orally transmitted compositions. The translation of *veda* as "knowledge" or "wisdom," though correct, is also misleading. The predominant Indian way to approach the Vedas is to consider them in the first place as recitations. This is indicated by the term *saṃhitā*.

In the case of the Ṛgveda there is only one *saṃhitā*, which is called *Ṛksaṃhitā*. References to the Ṛgveda, without further specification, are to the *Ṛksaṃhitā*. In the case of the other Vedas, there are several *saṃhitā* traditions, referred to by different names. In the case of the Yajurveda, the one that is relevant for the Nambudiri Agnicayana is the Taittirīya *Saṃhitā*.

Throughout the centuries, the Vedic recitations have been transmitted orally by members of the brahmin community. Each brahmin belongs by birth to one of the Vedas, and is initiated into the recitation of his particular

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Veda by his father or by a teacher, either at home or in a Vedic school. Elaborate mnemotechnic methods have been devised to safeguard the proper formal transmission of these compositions, and to eliminate or decrease the danger of losing words, syllables, or accents. The simplest of these methods is the memorization of the padapāṭha alongside the saṃhitā recitation. There are several mnemotechnic modifications (*vikṛti*), in which the words of the padapāṭha are recited in certain definite combinations and permutations. In a simple extension of the padapāṭha, each word is repeated once. Even this is not as simple as it seems, for the sandhi combinations and the accents are also modified according to rules. One of the more complex modifications is called *ghana*. If the words of the padapāṭha are represented by numerals as 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / . . . , the ghana is 1 2 2 1 1 2 3 3 2 1 1 2 3 / 2 3 3 2 2 3 4 4 3 2 2 3 4 / The beginning of the ghana of the sentence illustrated before thereby becomes: *agnīr no no'gnīr agnīr no yajñām yajñām no'gnīr agnīr no yajñām* / The ghana of the English translation would begin as follows: Agni may may Agni Agni may he he may Agni Agni may he / Many of these modifications can be heard on Levy-staal (1968). Their rules are given in phonetic treatises called *prātiśākhya*, attached to each of the branches of the Vedas. For each of the hymns of the Ṛgveda the names of the composer or seer (*ṛṣi*) and of the deity (*devatā*) to whom the hymn is dedicated, are preserved. The names of the original meters (*chandas*) are also handed down traditionally. The metrical structure itself has not been retained in the actual practice of recitation. In texts that were originally accented, the location of the original accent is maintained in the oral transmission; the original rendering of the accent, however, is generally lost.

According to the lawbook of Manu, a brahmin who does not know the Vedic verse is as useless as a eunuch among women (*Manusmṛti* 2.158, quoted Ingalls 1959, 3). In actual practice the knowledge of brahmins varies greatly. The minimum each brahmin knows is the *Gāyatrī*, a three-line verse from the Ṛgveda (3.62.10): "May we receive this desirable light of the god Savitṛ, who shall impel our thoughts." This verse, recited daily during the *Sandhyā* ceremony (cf. Srinivasan 1973), is taught at the time of *Upanayana*, the investiture with the sacred thread that each brahmin undergoes at his initiation ceremony, or "second birth."

Alongside this transmission of sound, there has not been a comparable or equally ancient oral tradition that preserves the meaning. With the development of classical Sanskrit, and of middle and modern Indian languages, there has accordingly been a gradual loss of the meaning of much of the recited material that had been composed in the older Vedic language. The reciters might be familiar with the names of the deities that are invoked, or might know the meaning of some Vedic words that occur in the recitation, and that also occur (though often with a different meaning) in classical Sanskrit or in modern Indian languages. However, in recent times, they generally do not understand longer phrases. The reciters are primarily preservers of the

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Vedic tradition, not Vedic scholars. They are dedicated to the preservation of their sacred heritage for posterity. Without them, scholars of the Vedas would have nothing to be scholars of. Had the reciters themselves been scholars concerned with meaning, the original sounds might have long been lost.

Separate from this formal transmission there is an entire development of intellectual traditions in India, which was concerned with meaning, but which gradually moved away from the Vedic heritage and evolved the numerous systems and schools of thought that make up much of later Hinduism. The Vedas were preserved in their pristine purity, uninterpreted, unaffected by what went on elsewhere, and accordingly without exerting much influence on these later developments. And so we witness a development that is probably without parallel: for about 3,000 years, a class of people devoted themselves in relative isolation to the formal preservation of a large number of oral compositions, confining themselves almost entirely to sound. This transmission has been at least as faithful as have been manuscript traditions in other parts of the world. Sound, though perhaps not as durable as stone or clay, has proved much less susceptible to wear and tear than paper. As a result, we have access to one of the ancient literatures of mankind almost in its original form and in its entirety.

This extraordinary effort of memorization can largely be explained by a simple fact: when the Vedas were composed, writing was unknown in the community to which the composers belonged. It is a matter of controversy whether at a much earlier period a regular system of writing was used in the Indus civilization, which at one time had occupied the same areas that the Vedic nomads entered. But even if a writing system did exist, it is not open to doubt that the art of writing had disappeared with the advent of the Vedic culture. When writing was later introduced (or reintroduced) from elsewhere, it was considered alien to the Vedic heritage and therefore unfit as a receptacle for the Vedas. In the beginning, this foreign invention was mostly confined to commercial use and to royal edicts. It was gradually adopted in all branches of learning, and finally the Vedas themselves were committed to writing. For a long time, however, writing continued to be considered impure and even offensive. A later Vedic text, the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* (5.5.3), states that a pupil should not recite the Veda after he has eaten meat, seen blood or a dead body, had intercourse, or engaged in writing. Unlike the ancient civilizations of the Near East and of China, Vedic civilization flourished without literacy. In India, writing has always been held in lower esteem than memory or the sound of recitation. This explains, among other things, the importance attached to *mantras*, a term originally applied to the Vedic verse.

The oral transmission of the Vedas from father to son or from teacher to pupil is known as *adhyāya*, "learning" or "recitation." This is contrasted with *prayoga*, "ritual application," which refers to the general use of Vedic texts in ritual, or *vinīyoga*, which refers to the recitation of a particular mantra at a particular point in the ritual. Vedic ritual is primarily characterized

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by the recitation, by one or more priests, of Vedic passages. The structure and organization of this recited material follows the requirements of the ritual. As a result, sentences and verses are often taken out of their original context (which is preserved in *adhyāya* only) and adapted to new surroundings. A reciter who is familiar with the *prayoga* has learned different arrangements of fragments of the oral tradition that he has already memorized, and knows where to insert them into ritual structures. This new dimension of learning may be handed down orally too, and without any connection with ritual activity. And so we meet with three kinds of knowledge, handed down orally, each presupposing the former. Most reciters preserve the Vedic texts in their original, or presumed original, order. Some among them have, in addition, learned how recitations have to be modified and rearranged for use in ritual. A few have preserved the ritual practice itself, and know what, how, where, and when to act as well as to recite.

The importance of recitation in the realm of Vedic ritual is not merely a recent development, which might be explained by the fact that ritual recitations are more easily preserved than the ritual activities they accompany. Throughout the Vedic period, the importance of language has been emphasized, and many ritual acts are only performed by uttering mantras, as is stated repeatedly in the Vedic literature. Thus we need not be surprised when we find, for example, that Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 9.1.2.17 declares with reference to the Agnicayana, "This fire altar is language, for it is piled up with language" (already quoted on page 18).

With regard to ritual, the four Vedas are not on a par. The Ṛgveda contains numerous references to ritual practices. Many priestly functions and names of priests are mentioned, and there are terms for particular rites and ritual recitations, for altars, and especially for rites connected with Soma. However, the precise significance of many of the ritual terms is unclear and, taken as a whole, these references are too fragmentary to permit the reconstruction of specific rituals. Potdar (1953) has tried to establish four stages of ritual development in the Ṛgveda, but when it comes to formulating the differences, he is relatively vague. Kashikar (1964) has, moreover, shown that there are many exceptions to Potdar's presumed generalizations.

In the Yajurveda the situation is different. In the *samhitā* traditions we find mantras that are to be recited at the rituals, and prose passages explaining them. The ritual specification that is provided is generally consistent with the detailed descriptions given in the later ritual manuals attached to the Yajurveda. The ritual that emerges from these descriptions is generally referred to as "Vedic ritual." I shall sometimes call it "classical Vedic ritual" to distinguish it from earlier rituals, such as the ritual of the Ṛgveda or the lost rituals of the original inhabitants of the subcontinent. The arrangement and organization of the Yajurveda itself is largely determined by ritual considerations. Not only is much of its subject matter ritual, but the text itself is used in rituals. The Ṛgveda, on the other hand, is used only in part in the clas-

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sical ritual, and many portions have no ritual connection. The Ṛgveda consists, for the greater part, of "family books," and does not have a clearly visible ritual structure. It would be rash to assume that it originally had such a structure that was lost subsequently. It is true that ritualistic interpretations of the Ṛgveda have found favor among scholars from Bergaigne to Bloomfield, who wrote, for example: "If we had before us the ritual practices which accompanied the Ṛgvedic hymns at the time of their composition, the Ṛgveda would lose much of its obscurity" (quoted in Kashikar 1968, 9). This may be true in some cases; but on the whole, those scholars look at the Ṛgveda through the eyes of the Yajurveda.

In some parts of the Sāmaveda, a ritual arrangement has been adopted. It occupies, in this respect, a place between Ṛgveda and Yajurveda. The Sāmaveda consists, for the largest part, of material taken from the Ṛgveda and set to music. This adaptation from texts to melodies has resulted in numerous textual changes and in the insertion of much new material, originally perhaps necessitated by the requirements of melody. An example will make this clear. The first melody of the *Jaiminiya Sāmaveda* is based upon the following mantra from the Ṛgveda:

agna ā yāhi vītaye gr̥ṇāno havyadātaye
ni hotā satsi barhiṣi

"Agni, come to the feast, after being extolled,
come to the gift of offerings!

As Hota sit down on the sacrificial grass!"

(RV 6.16.10 = TB 3.5.2.1; with this mantra the second brick of the fire altar is consecrated. See below page 388)

अग्निं आयाहि वीतये

गुणानो हव्यदातये ।

नि होता सत्सि बृहिषि ॥

In the Jaiminiya Sāmaveda this mantra is transformed into:

ō gnā yi / ā yāhi vā yi / tāyā yi tāyā yi / gr̥ṇāno havyadā / tāyā yi tāyā yi / nā yi
hotā / sā tsā yi bā au ho vā / hī ṣī //

(GG 1.1)

The oblique bar ("/"), used to demarcate the portions of this chant, has a specific meaning: each portion (*bhakti*) should be sung with one breath. Meaningless syllables, such as *au ho vā*, are called *stobhas*. They inspired Faddegon to speak of "Ritualistic Dadaism" (1927). While the majority of the melodies (*sāman*) are based upon verses (*ṛk*) of the Ṛgveda, some derive from other sources, and others have no source at all. The latter consist entirely of *stobhas*, sometimes interspersed with bits and fragments of mantras. An example is one of the songs that accompany the consecration of the "Space-Filler" bricks of the first layer (Part II, page 444; see also Table 15):

agnom / agna ho agna ho agna hā ā vu vā / ē jyotiḥ //

(AG 25.32)

This is a composition on the name Agni with *jyotiḥ*, "light", added in the

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finale as illumination or embellishment. Such pieces are common in the *Aranyageyagāna*, "Songs to be Sung in the Forest," from which the above song has been taken.

The structure of the Sāmaveda is complex. The mantras that underlie the melodies are listed in the *Ārcika*, "List of Verses," and the melodies are listed in the *Grāmageyagāna*, "Songs to be Sung in the Village," and in the *Aranyageyagāna*. The same melodies recur in the *Ūhagāna* and *Ūhyagāna* (which the Nambudiris call *Ūṣāṇi*), but other verses are added, and the material is arranged in the form and order required in the ritual. Some of the principles underlying this arrangement will become apparent in the course of the following description. The texts of the Jaiminīya will be described in a separate note (below, pages 276–278).

A few of the melodies of the Sāmaveda are based upon mantras from the Atharvaveda. The Atharvaveda itself, though perhaps as ancient as the Ṛgveda, has an entirely different background and was added only later to the "three Vedas." It has been introduced into the classical ritual to a very limited extent. On the whole, it may be characterized as *yajñānupayuktaḥ*, "not employed in the ritual" (Madhusūdana, in Renou 1947, 214; cf. Renou 1955a).

The Yajurveda provides principles of organization that will enable us to establish some order in the mass of rites that constitute the classical ritual, and in the mass of texts that describe and interpret these rites from different points of view. The classification of rituals will be taken up in the next section (The Śrauta Rituals). The classification of texts reflects, to a large extent, the subdivision of the Vedas into schools (*śakhā*). Like the classical ritual, and in close connection with it, these schools developed primarily in Yajurvedic circles. The Yajurveda is divided into two domains: the (older) Black (*Kṛṣṇa*) Yajurveda and the (later) White (*Śukla*) Yajurveda. The Black Yajurveda comprises four schools, each with its own saṃhitā. Each saṃhitā contains a mixture of two types of passages: mantra and brāhmaṇa. In general, mantra passages are in verse and are recited during rites, but they also comprise *yajus* formulas; brāhmaṇa passages are in prose and describe or elucidate the mantras and their connection with the rites. Both are accented. From the standpoint of Yajurveda, and from the ritual point of view, the Ṛksaṃhitā consists entirely of mantras. So does the one saṃhitā of the White Yajurveda, the *Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā*.

Let us now return to the subdivision of each of the Vedas into several portions, of which the saṃhitā is the first. There are three other categories: Brāhmaṇa, Āraṇyaka, and Upaniṣad. It is to be noted that there is therefore an ambiguity in the term brāhmaṇa, as applied to Vedic texts. On the one hand, it means a prose passage that describes or interprets rites. When used in this sense, I shall write brāhmaṇa without capital. On the other hand, "Brāhmaṇa," with capital, denotes the second category of subdivision of each of the Vedas, which is often a collection of brāhmaṇa passages. The

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two senses remain distinct even where they are coextensive.

In the Black Yajurveda, one of the four schools (the most important one for most of this book) is called *Taittirīya*. The four subdivisions are called after it: Taittirīya Saṃhitā (TS), Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa (TB), Taittirīya Āraṇyaka (TA), and Taittirīya Upaniṣad (TU). The name Taittirīya is derived from *tittiri*, "partridge," traditionally taken to refer to a teacher. The suggestion that it was originally the name of a totemistic clan is without foundation. Like the Taittirīya Saṃhitā, the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa and the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka consist of a mixture of mantra and brāhmaṇa passages, both accented. Among the other schools, mention may be made of the *Maitrāyaṇi*, since this is the school with which Tsuji deals in Part III, Volume II. In the case of the White Yajurveda, the two schools may be regarded as two recensions of the same text. The Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā (VS) of the White Yajurveda, as we have seen, is in verse and consists of mantras. Its important brāhmaṇa, the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (ŚB), "Brāhmaṇa of the Hundred Paths," will be quoted frequently.

In the case of the Ṛgveda, two schools are referred to, but their distinction is largely theoretical with respect to the Ṛksaṃhitā, and becomes apparent only from the Brāhmaṇa onward. The two Brāhmaṇas of the Ṛgveda, the *Kauṣītaki* and the *Aitareya*, are in prose and are not accented. In the case of the Sāmaveda, many schools are referred to, but for all practical purposes they fall into two groups: the *Kauthuma-Rāṇāyaṇīya* and the Jaiminīya.

Table 1 provides a survey of the names of the principal subdivisions and schools of the Vedas.

In later times, the entire Vedic corpus of recitations is referred to as śruti, "what is heard," i.e., "what is revealed." It is regarded as apauruṣeya, "of nonhuman origin." Numerous other texts were attached to this sacred revelation, many of which deal with more specialized topics, viz., phonetics (treated in the prātiśākhya literature, already referred to), ritual, altar construction (involving geometry), grammar, etymology, metrics, and astronomy. Together with others, these manuals are considered smṛti, "what is remembered." They are accordingly less authoritative than śruti. This implies that in case of conflict between śruti and smṛti, śruti prevails. Many of these manuals are written in a particular style, the sūtra style, which is formulaic and aphoristic and tends to brevity. The sūtra style initiates a new development, characterized by analysis and a more logical, philosophical, and scientific approach. Because of their brevity, the sūtra works are often obscure and require commentaries (*bhāṣya*, *vṛtti*, *ṭīkā*) for their elucidation.

In the present context the only sūtras that are relevant are the ritual sūtras. These are of two types: śrauta sūtra and gṛhya sūtra. The former, which are generally older (though not in the case of the Atharvaveda), deal with the śrauta rites, rites "based upon śruti." In French these are called *les rites solennels*. The latter deal with the gṛhya rites (from *gṛha*, "home, house"), domestic or life-cycle rites such as the ceremonies performed at the

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Schools:	Samhitā:	Brāhmaṇa:	Āraṇyaka:	Upaniṣad:	Śrauta Sūtras:
R̥gveda	Sākala } Vāskala }	R̥k	Aitareya Kauṣītaki or Śāṅkhāyana	Aitareya Kauṣītaki	Āśvalāyana Śāṅkhāyana
Yajurveda	Kṛṣṇa (Black) Taittirīya	Taittirīya	Taittirīya	Taittirīya	Baudhāyana Vādhūla or Bādhlā Bhāradvāja Āpastamba Hiranyakeśin Vaikhāṇasa Kāthaka Mānava Vārāha
	Kāthaka Maitrāyaṇi	Kāthaka Maitrāyaṇi	Kāthaka	Kāthaka Maitri	
	Sukla (White): Mādhyaṃdina Kāṇva	Vājasaneyi	Śatapatha	Īśa and Bṛhadāraṇyaka	Kātyāyana
Sāmaveda	Kauthuma- Rāṇāyana Jaiminiya or Talavakāra	Sāma	Pañcaviṃśa Ṣaḍviṃśa Jaiminiya	Chāndogya Kena or Talavakāra	Lāṭyāyana Drāhyāyana Jaiminiya
Atharvaveda	Śaunaka Paippalāda	Atharva	Gopatha	Muṇḍaka, Māṇḍūkya, etc.	Vaitāna

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occasion of a birth, initiation and investiture with the sacred thread (Upa-nayana), marriage, or death. As we have already seen, there are several general and formal differences between the two kinds of ritual. For example, the śrauta rites require three fire altars and the services of several priests, whereas the grhya rites require only one fire (the domestic fire) and one priest (the *purohita*). While the function of the domestic rites is fairly straightforward, the significance of the śrauta rites is not obvious. This constitutes one of the main problems and attractions of the study of the śrauta ritual. The śrauta ritual exhibits the unhampered development of ritual construction and creativity. As we have already seen, there are śrauta rituals that last a thousand years, which shows that these rites were not always performed, but were sometimes purely theoretical. These theoretical constructions are important, for they help us to understand the concept of ritual structure (as dealt with, for example, in Part III, pages 127–134). The rituals that will be referred to in this book are all śrauta rituals.

The śrauta sūtras are known by different names and are attached to the various Vedic schools. They are listed in Table 1. It is clear from this table that ritual flourished especially in the Yajurveda. "Avec le Yajurveda on accède à la tradition la plus importante, celle qui est au centre même du culte et que viennent alimenter des textes considérables" (Renou 1947, 137). The reason why there are so many different texts, reflecting different schools, is partly ritual. The larger celebrations require the collaboration of four groups of priests, one for each of the four Vedas. Each group evolved its own manual. Such manuals complement each other, like the music printed for different instruments that together make up one orchestra. With the development and further differentiation of the ceremonies, problems arose within the same Veda. Various solutions to such problems were adopted by different groups of ritualists, which led to a differentiation into branches or schools, in due course reflected in different śrauta sūtras. Even within a śrauta sūtra, other opinions may be incorporated, or listed as options (as is done, e.g., in the *Dvaidha* section of Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra), which later develop into separate traditions.

Later, works were composed that deal with a single ritual by combining the contributions of the different groups of priests; some of these works are called prayoga or *paddhati*. This has been carried further by modern scholars, e.g., Hillebrandt (1880: Full- and New-Moon Rituals), Schwab (1886: animal sacrifice), Caland and Henry (1906: Agniṣṭoma). Such works are like the conductor's score, but include in addition other recensions and options.

Most of the sciences treated in the early sūtra literature are similarly differentiated according to Veda and śākhā, "branch" or Vedic school. The prātiśākhya, attached to each of the Vedic branches (as their name indicates: "one for each branch"), deal with the phonetic characteristics of their own branch. These phonetic treatises are therefore typically confined to the analysis of a specific corpus of utterances. The exception is grammar, which

PART I THE AGNICAYANA RITUAL

pertains to all the Vedas. The oldest work of grammar that is preserved intact is the grammar of Pāṇini. This work is not a catalogue of facts about a particular text, but a grammar of Sanskrit that provides rules for the derivation of linguistic forms, and in so doing expresses a general theory of language (for the contrast with the *prātiśākhya* literature, see e.g., Staal 1967, Chapter 2; 1972, 140–141; 1974). After centuries of domination by the Vedic schools, grammar came, therefore, as a liberation (Renou 1947, 213). This universalization signalled the breakdown of the edifice of the Vedic schools and of Vedic culture itself, and led to entirely new developments. The Upaniṣads contributed to these events in a similar way: their affiliation to the Vedic schools became increasingly academic, and all later Upaniṣads were attached to the Atharvaveda by fiat.

Specimens from the śrauta sūtras are given in Part IV of this book, and in one contribution of Part III. With the exception of the late Vaikhāṇasa, the period of the śrauta sūtras is roughly from 700 to 300 B.C. The earliest author of a śrauta sūtra, Baudhāyana, is the inventor of the sūtra genre, which has remained one of the chief vehicles for the expression of Indian scholarly and scientific culture. The sūtra style is ideally suited to concise and factual description, pushing condensation to the extreme by the use of nominal composition, and eliminating all interpretation and speculation. While Baudhāyana's Śrauta Sūtra marks the origin of sūtra composition, Pāṇini's grammar is its apogee. Baudhāyana's style is still, in some respects, reminiscent of the Brāhmaṇa literature, and in this respect constitutes a transition. Baudhāyana's work was called *pravacana*, a term that probably underlines its explicit character, as distinct from the esoteric tendencies of the Brāhmaṇas (Renou 1963, 180; for a slightly different interpretation see Gonda 1977, 514–515). Much later, the sūtra style was characterized as *viśvatomukha*, "facing in all directions," viz., fully perspicuous. This applies very well to the Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra, which is the most detailed and explicit of the śrauta sūtras.

Caland took *pravacana* to mean "oral teaching." Writing in fact became known during the later part of the sūtra period, but it remains unclear to what extent it may have been used in the śrauta literature. The sūtra style, with its formulaic character, is very suitable for memorization, even more so than the Vedic recitations themselves (cf. Renou 1947, 33–34, 222–223; 1963, 199). Though Western scholars, used as they are to reading and writing, have found it hard to believe, sūtra composition may very well have been an oral exercise, like the composition of the Vedas themselves.

Just as each brahmin belongs by birth to one Veda, he belongs, within his Veda, to one school. This implies that he should perform rituals in accordance with the sūtras of his own school. But since the larger śrauta rituals require participation among priests belonging to different schools, co-operation among the different schools becomes necessary. The system of Vedic schools is therefore a structure of fixed units, which, however, are inter-

2. THE AGNICAYANA IN CLASSICAL VEDIC RITUAL

dependent and complement each other.

In this sense, the organization of the Vedic schools is similar to the social organization of the brahmin community: brahmins are endogamous with respect to caste, but exogamous with respect to *gotra* (a kind of clan to which a brahmin also belongs by birth). Vedic affiliation and marriage alliance are independent of each other: a brahmin need not marry within his Veda. The organization of the Vedic schools is also, in some respects, similar to the structure of sects in later Hinduism. This has been generally misunderstood by foreigners, including most Western scholars. Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, for example, are not rival religions enjoining a belief in Śiva and Viṣṇu, respectively, nor are they rival options. They are separate traditions. Such affiliations are largely determined by birth, and have little to do with private preference or individual option. Conversions must have occurred when the Vedic nomads began to interact with the indigenous population. Though a movement of conversion in the opposite direction appeared in Jainism and Buddhism—a late retaliation to the invasion by the Vedic nomads—conversion remained alien to classical Hinduism. There have been periods of intense religious strife, but for political rather than religious reasons. Moreover, in Vedic religion as well as in Hinduism, it is relatively unimportant what a person privately thinks or believes; what counts are his public and cooperative activities. Hence the emphasis on orthopraxy, "right activity," rather than orthodoxy, "right opinion" (Staal 1959).

The overall picture that arises from the ritual texts indicates, in the words of Heesterman (1962, 2):

. . . that Vedic religion did not relate itself to differing forms of religion. The antithesis is between more or less effective rites, or of old, superseded (*utsanna*) versus new rites, all of which are viewed within the framework of the same religion. Moreover, the ritual texts are concerned with orthopraxy, not with orthodoxy. Where an orthodoxy may open the possibility of conversion, orthopraxy, being indifferent to conversion, will stress purification (cf. also Renou 1955a, 439, note 3).

Without the affiliation system of the Vedic schools, which is based upon birth, Vedic ritual and the Vedas themselves would not have survived over the millenia and in spite of all later developments. The ensuing restrictions, however, might also be responsible for the final disappearance of the ritual. The Vedic traditions of the Nambudiri brahmins, to which I shall return in Chapter 6, offer a case in point. The Nambudiri performance of Vedic rituals is on the verge of extinction primarily because of the increasing rarity of qualified Sāmavedins, due to the lack of interest of the younger generation. In a desperate effort to preserve the ritual, a few R̥gvedins suggested some years ago that their sons and grandsons be trained in the difficult art of

PART I THE AGNICAYANA RITUAL

chanting the ritual chants of the Sāmaveda. Though similarly concerned, the Sāmavedins have been unwilling to teach them. One reason is that the Ṛgvedins, at the time of Upanayana, are not initiated in the same manner as the Sāmavedins. One characteristic of the Nambudiri Sāmaveda Upanayana is that the initiated boy should wear the same cloth for the duration of one full year, washing and cleaning it over and over again. This is not required in the Ṛgveda Upanayana, which therefore does not qualify a Ṛgveda boy to learn Sāmaveda. Such facts indicate that, for a brahmin, it is just as unthinkable to change his second birth as to change his first birth or his body.

THE ŚRAUTA RITUALS

THOUGH THE DETAILS vary, almost all parts of the Yajurvedic corpus presuppose a particular classification of śrauta rituals. This becomes explicit in the śrauta sūtras, in which the rituals are arranged in a sequence in which each ritual presupposes the previous one. Moreover, a later ritual in the hierarchy can only be performed by a person who has already performed the earlier ones. A list of the main śrauta rituals is given in Table 2. This is not complete, and the following description is even less complete.

The simplest śrauta ritual is the agnihotra. It consists of an oblation of

THE ŚRAUTA RITUALS

Agnyādheya (= Agnyādhāna)
Agnihotra
Darśapūrṇamāsa
Cāturmāsya
Paśubandha
Agniṣṭoma
Ukthya
Śoḍaśin
Atirātra
Aptoryāma
Atyagniṣṭoma
Vājapeya
Agnicayana

TABLE 2

2. THE AGNICAYANA IN CLASSICAL VEDIC RITUAL

milk, offered every evening and morning. The rites are performed by the adhvaryu priest, who belongs to the Yajurveda, on behalf of a yajamāna, "sacrificer" or "patron of the ritual," generally accompanied by his wife, the *yajamānapatnī*. The yajamāna may also perform the ritual on his own behalf. Yajamāna and yajamānapatnī may belong to any of the three twice-born classes: brahmins, chieftains or soldiers (*kṣatriya*), and tribesmen or farmers (*vaiśya*). The adhvaryu, and all other priests who officiate in śrauta rituals, are brahmins. This accords with the fact that only brahmins have been trained in the Vedic recitations that accompany the rites.

The Agnihotra is performed inside a ritual enclosure within the home of the yajamāna. Three fires are required: the *gārhapatya*, "belonging to the householder," which I shall refer to as domestic fire;¹ the *āhavanīya*, "in which the oblations are offered," which I shall refer to as offering fire; and the *dakṣiṇāgni*, "southern fire," which I shall refer to as such. The fires are installed on fireplaces or altars made of clay. The domestic altar is round and is located near the western end of the ritual enclosure, the offering altar is square and is located near its eastern end, and the southern altar is semi-circular and is located on its southern side. These positions are indicated in Figure 1, where the customary places of the yajamāna (Y) and his wife (P) are also marked.

In all śrauta rituals there are three basic elements: dravyam, the substance of the oblation; devatā, the deity to whom the oblation is offered; and tyāga, the formula pronounced by the yajamāna at the time of the oblation, by which he renounces the benefits or fruits of the ritual in favor of the deity (it can also refer to the oblation itself). The oblations are generally prepared on the domestic fire and are offered into the offering fire. In the case of the Agnihotra, the substance of the oblation is milk, but certain vegetable substances may be adopted as substitutes. In the evening Agnihotra, a first oblation is offered to Agni and a second to Prajāpati. In the morning Agnihotra, the first oblation is for Sūrya and the second again for Prajāpati. The tyāga formulas, uttered by the yajamāna, are of the form: "this is for Agni not for me" (*agnaye idem na mama*, and analogously for the other deities). Increasingly, tyāga is seen as the essence of ritual. The term was to have a great future in Hinduism. In the Bhagavad Gītā, tyāga means abandoning and renouncing of the fruits of all activity, and is advocated as the highest goal of life (see above, page 5).

Though the Agnihotra is the simplest of the śrauta rituals, it comes after the *Agnyādheya* or *Agnyādhāna* ritual, during which the three fires are installed, and which is therefore presupposed. Installing fire involves *agni-manthana*, "making fire by friction," a method that is resorted to several times again in the course of subsequent rituals. There are different opinions

¹ I am not concerned here with the grhya fire, which has also been called "domestic" fire.

PLATE I

Making Fire (*Agnimanthana*)

C.V. Vasudevan Akkitiripad, the yajamāna's eldest brother, on whose behalf the Atirātra-Agnicayana ritual was performed in 1955, pulls the strings that cause the churning stick (mantha, Malayalam: iṭattapṭū) to rotate in a hole in the lower kindling block (adharāraṇi). The pratiprasthātā pushes the stick down with the help of a half coconut shell. The upper kindling block (uttarāraṇi) lies to the left of the lower one. During the 12-day Atirātra-Agnicayana, new fire has to be made seven times. The plate shows fire being made for the animal sacrifice for Vāyu on the first day (Episode 2: below, page 303).



PART I THE AGNICAYANA RITUAL

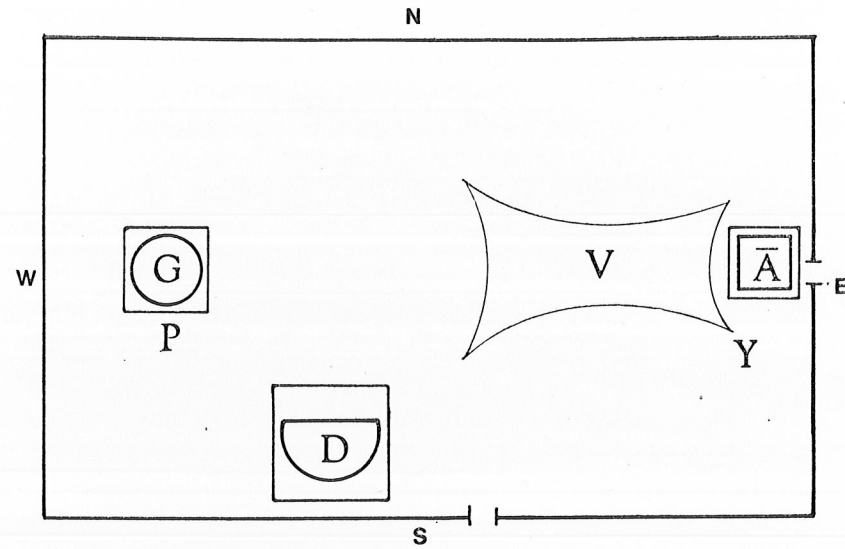


Figure 1—The Ritual Enclosure

- G: *gārhapatya*, domestic fire
D: *dakṣiṇāgni*, southern fire
Ā: *āhavaniya*, offering fire
V: *vedi*, receptacle for ritual implements and substances of oblations
Y: customary place of the Yajamāna
P: customary place of the Yajamānapatnī

with regard to the keeping of the fires. Either the three fires are kept alive in the house of the yajamāna throughout his life as a householder, or the domestic fire is kept alive, and the other two are lit from it at each Agnihotra performance. If the fires have not been kept or have gone out, they are re-installed during the *Punarādheya* ritual. A brahmin who keeps the three sacred fires is called *āhitāgni*, “who has installed the fire,” or *agnihotrin*, “who performs Agnihotra.”

The features of the Agnihotra so far mentioned are nothing but its skeleton. The śrauta sūtras specify a great deal of additional detail: restrictions on eligibility of the participants, time, preparation of the altars, fires and oblations (e.g., the precise manner in which the Agnihotra cow is milked), implements used, movements gone through, options, and all the accompanying recitations. Instead of pursuing these specifications, and before reviewing other śrauta rituals, we may ask what reality has corresponded, and still corresponds, to such descriptions. There is a general answer that is applicable to all the ritual works. At the time of their composition, the descriptions of the śrauta sūtras reflected existing and earlier practice, but—once formulated—they determined later and future practice. The ritual literature, which was at least partly descriptive in origin, became in due course entirely

2. THE AGNICAYANA IN CLASSICAL VEDIC RITUAL

prescriptive, and came to be regarded as the final codification of the ritual.

At the present time, rituals are performed, theoretically, in accordance with the statements of the śrauta sūtras, which are interpreted as rules. It does not follow that brahmin ritualists consult the sūtras and then act accordingly. Śrauta performances in recent times range from the academic and revivalistic to the traditional. While in and around academic circles, rites may be reconstructed from texts with or without the assistance of traditional practitioners, there are inaccessible places where rituals are still performed without scholarly aids and in accordance with a living tradition. Such a living tradition need not be entirely oral. It may involve the consultation of manuscripts, often of later date, and sometimes written in one of the modern Indian languages. Though such later works (which are generally unpublished) may be ultimately traced to the śrauta sūtras, a chain of intermediate works has intervened, the earlier ones in Sanskrit (like the *Prayoga* and *Paddhati* texts), and the later ones in modern languages. Since local traditions may have been incorporated, and other changes may have taken place, the original sūtras are in fact no longer authoritative: the living tradition prevails. Revivalistic performances are therefore more faithful to the manuals, whereas living traditions exhibit greater variety.

It would be unwarranted to assume that, in the past, śrauta traditions were always handed down from father to son and from teacher to pupil without fresh consultation of the ancient manuals. Revivalistic performances are not confined to the present century, but have taken place several times in the past, when orthodox brahmins (for example, adherents of the philosophical system of the *Mīmāṃsā*) were concerned about the weakening of their Vedic heritage. In North India, during the Gupta dynasty, in the fourth and fifth century A.D., there was a large-scale revival of Vedic culture, and numerous śrauta performances took place. At Varanasi (Banaras), the origin of the *Daśāśvamedha* ghat, which marks the place where, according to tradition, ten *Āśvamedha* rituals were performed, may be traced back to this period. In South India, the empires of Chola (IXth through XIIth centuries) and of Vijayanagara (XIVth through XVIth centuries) marked other revivals of Vedic culture, that included ritual performances and the composition of ritual works.

How much śrauta culture survives in the present century can be seen from the number of *āhitāgnis* or *agnihottrins*. In 1958, Kashikar estimated, “There are about a hundred *āhitāgnis* in the whole of India, and one half of these are in Tanjore District (Madras) alone” (Kashikar 1958, 62). In an unpublished report of 1971, I ventured to guess that “there are some 50 *agnihottrins* in Andhra, which is more than in Tamilnad and Kerala together” (Staal 1971, 12). These estimates are put in proper perspective by the results of the investigations by Parpola and Kashikar, published below in Part III, pages 193–251. From this we learn that “in recent times” (i.e., during roughly the last hundred years) there have been and are almost 600 *āhitāgnis* in In-

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dia. Of these, 200 alone are in Andhra Pradesh, and approximately 125 each in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Kashikar and Parpola also provide more specific information on recent performances of the rarer śrauta rituals. Nambudiri information supplements this in another section of Part III (pages 252–255).

I shall now review some of the other śrauta rituals. There are three main categories. The first is called *iṣṭi* or *haviryajña*, rituals in which the oblation is of rice or barley; the second are animal sacrifices; the third are Soma rituals. In the first category, we have already met with *Agnyādheya*, *Punarādheya*, and *Agnihotra*. Two others are *Darśapūrṇamāsa* and *Cāturmāsya*. The *Cāturmāsya*, “four-monthly” or “seasonal” ceremonies, are an extension of the former.

The Darśapūrṇamāsa, the full- and new-moon ceremonies, incorporate recitations from two Vedas, Yajurveda and Ṛgveda, and require the services of four priests: the adhvaryu of the Yajurveda, the hotā of the Ṛgveda, the brahman, and the āgnīdhra. The hotā recites from the Ṛgveda. The brahman sits by the side of the yajamāna and supervises the rites, in general without participating. When mistakes have been made, he determines what should be done and prescribes, if necessary, expiation rites (*prāyaścitta*). In larger rituals he is attached to the Atharvaveda, but this is arbitrary. He need not belong to that Veda, and rarely does. He is said, in fact, to officiate “with the three Vedas,” viz., Ṛg-, Yajur-, and Sāmaveda (Aitareya Āraṇyaka 3.2.3.6; Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 11.5.8.7; etc.). The āgnīdhra (or agnīdh), “kindler of fire,” is attached to the Atharvaveda in a similarly arbitrary manner.

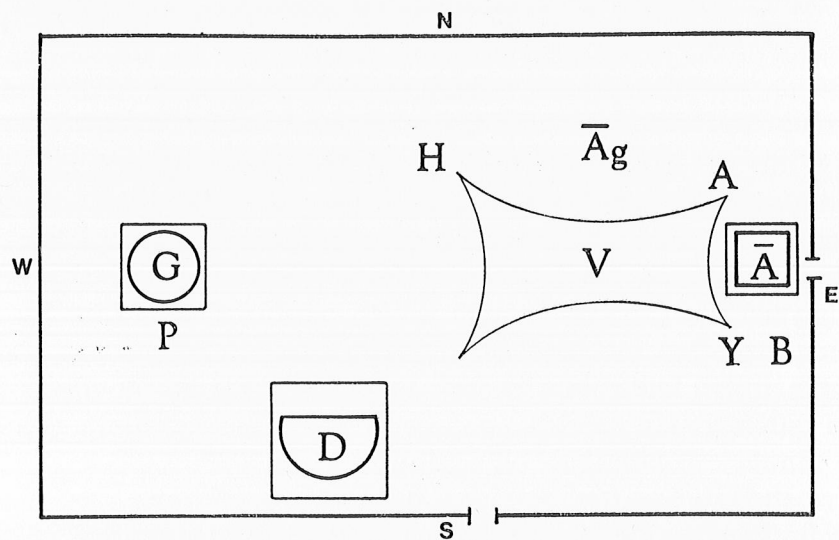


Figure 2—Customary Positions of the Priests

- A: Adhvaryu of Yajurveda
H: Hotā of Ṛgveda
B: Brahman
Āg: Āgnīdhra

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His principal task is to shout: *astu śrauṣaṭ* “Be it so! May he hear!” in response to the adhvaryu’s exclamation: *o śrāvaya* “Make (him) hear!” These exclamations call the deities down to earth to be present at the ritual and partake of the oblations. The four officiating priests generally occupy the positions shown in Figure 2.

The Darsapūrṇamāsa ritual exhibits the basic pattern of the iṣṭi rites; it is their paradigm. These rites are characterized by a dialogue between the participating priests, which culminates in an offering. The scene is set as in Figure 2. First the adhvaryu tells the hotā to address the deity, e.g., Agni, by saying: *agnaye'nubrūhi* "Address Agni!" The hotā recites verses from the Ṛgveda that sometimes extol, or at least refer to, qualities and virtues of the deity in question, viz., Agni. These verses lead up to the *yājyā* or "offering verse," and are called *anuvākya*, "invitations," *puro'nuvākya*, or *yājyānuvākya*. Then the adhvaryu exclaims: *o śrāvaya*, and the āgnidhra shouts his answer: *astu śrausaṭ*. The adhvaryu thereupon tells the hotā to recite his main recitation, the *yājyā*. He says to the hotā: *agnim yaja* "sacrifice to Agni" or "say the *yājyā* for Agni." The hotā begins by murmuring: *bhūr bhuvah/ye yajāmahe* "Earth! Air! We who sacrifice . . ." or "We who say the *yājyā*. . . ." The *yājyā* consists again of Ṛgvedic mantras and ends with the exclamation: *vausaṭ* "may (Agni) lead (the offerings to the gods)!" At the -ṣaṭ of *vausaṭ*, the adhvaryu makes the offering by throwing or pouring it into the offering fire. At the same time the yajamāna recites his *tyāga*: *agnaye idaṃ na mama* "This is for Agni, not for me (cf. page xxviii)."

I shall translate *iṣṭi* as "offering". Even if it is for another deity (e.g., *Prajāpati*), the offering is almost always made into the fire, and it is *Agni* who is the implicit subject of the *vausaṭ* call. Though *Agni* may also be the deity to whom the rites are addressed, as above, he is, in all cases, the intermediary through whom the offerings are made.

The iṣṭi offering is also called *yajati*, "he recites the yājyā," which therefore refers to the task of the hotā. It is characterized by the vauṣaṭ call and by the fact that the adhvaryu generally stands when making the offering. A second, similar ritual act is always distinguished from the iṣṭi offering. It is called *āhuti* which I shall translate as "oblation." It is also called *juhoti*, "he makes an oblation" or "he pours." This refers to the adhvaryu, generally seated during the oblation, at which time he calls: *svāhā!* The adhvaryu stands, however, during the "Full Oblations" (*pūrṇāhuti*), when a full ladle is entirely emptied.

The principal offerings of the Darśapūrṇamāsa are introduced and followed by numerous other rites. An important preceding rite is the placing of sticks of firewood (*samidh*) on the altar by the adhvaryu, which act is accompanied by the recitation of *sāmidhenī* verses (from the Ṛgveda) by the hotā. This is followed by two *āghāra* oblations of butter, five *prayāja* or preliminary offerings, and two *ājyabhāga* butter offerings for Agni and Soma. Then come the principal offerings, followed by an offering for Agni Svi-

PART I THE AGNICAYANA RITUAL

PLATE 2

ṣtakṛt, "Agni-to-whom-the-proper-offering-is-made," and *Idāhvāna*, "call of Idā," during which the adhvaryu puts rice cakes in the right hand of the hotā and in the idā-receptable, which are subsequently touched by the yajamāna. This is followed by three *anuyāja* or after-offerings. The yajamāna's *dakṣiṇā* is an offering presented to the priests, formerly taken to be merely a sacrificial fee. According to some, it is more than that: it strengthens the ritual and makes it complete "by integrating it into the cosmic circulation of wealth" (Heesterman 1959; Gonda 1965, 19-20; Malamoud 1976). At the Full- and New-Moon Ceremonies, the fee consists of *anvāhārya* rice, rice left after preparing rice cakes for the offerings. It is cooked on the southern fire, which is therefore sometimes called *anvāhārya-pacana*.

The Paśubandha, paradigm for the animal sacrifice, modifies the pattern of the Full- and New-Moon ceremonies in several important respects. The services of a second priest from the Ṛgveda, the *maitrāvaruṇa*, are required. Holding a staff, he generally stands to the right (i.e., to the south) of the hotā, who sits facing the offering fire. In the Paśubandha, as in all sub-

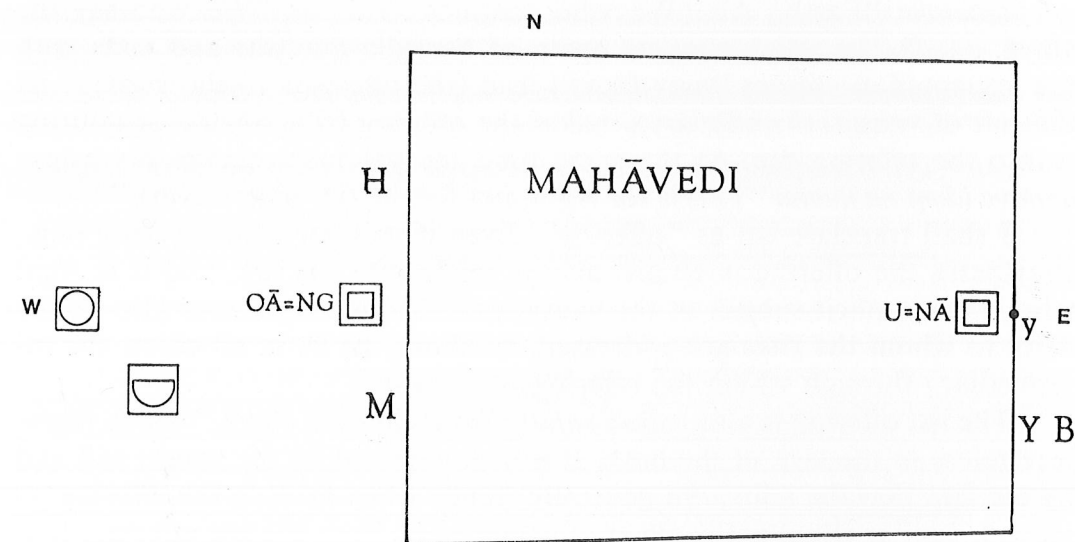


Figure 3—Ritual Enclosure for the Animal Sacrifice

- OĀ: old *āhavanīya* (old offering altar)
 = NG: new *gārhapatya* (new domestic altar)
 U: *uttaravedi*
 = NĀ: new *āhavanīya* (new offering altar)
 y: *yūpa* (sacrificial pole)
 H: Hotā of Ṛgveda
 M: Maitrāvaruṇa of Ṛgveda
 Y: Yajamāna
 B: Brahman

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sequent śrauta rituals, there is a transformation of the offering fire, which has moved further east. A new ritual enclosure, the *mahāvedi* or Great Altar space, is constructed and consecrated to the east of the old offering enclosure with its three fire altars. At the eastern end of this new *mahāvedi*, a new offering altar, the *uttaravedi*, is constructed. The old offering altar becomes the new domestic altar and the fire is carried (Agnipraṇayana) from here to the new offering altar. The ritual is then performed around the two new fire altars, as in Figure 3.

In the Paśubandha, the animal that is sacrificed, called *paśu*, is generally a goat. It is tied to a sacrificial post (*yūpa*), which is erected immediately to the east of the *uttaravedi*, on the eastern boundary of the *mahāvedi*. The animal is killed by choking it to death. This task is performed by the *śamitā* or "pacifier," generally a nonbrahmin, and it takes place outside the enclosure and without being observed by the priests. The basic dialogues of the *iṣṭi*, which take place when parts of the animal are offered into the offering fire, are modified by the participation of the *maitrāvaruṇa* priest. The adhvaryu starts by instructing the *maitrāvaruṇa* to tell the hotā to address the deity. After the *maitrāvaruṇa* has done this, the hotā continues as before. The deities to whom the paradigm animal sacrifice is dedicated are Indra, Agni, Sūrya, or Prajāpati. The Paśubandha should be performed every year or every six months.

We have now come to the Soma rituals, which presuppose and incorporate all previous rituals, but add numerous and significant new features. As their name indicates, the Soma rituals incorporate the preparation and offering of the Soma juice, which is extracted from the Soma plant. In addition, there are also two or more animal sacrifices, and numerous offerings and oblations of clarified butter, rice cakes, and other vegetable substances. The principal characteristic of the Soma rituals is a sequence of chants (*stotra*) from the Sāmaveda, sung by a chorus of three priests, and a corresponding sequence of recitations (*śastra*) from the Ṛgveda, each rendered by a single priest. These chants and recitations are combined with Soma rites in sequences that I shall call *Soma sequences*, each consisting of a *stotra* chant, a *śastra* recitation, Soma offering to the deities, and Soma drinking by the yajamāna and his main priests.

The Soma ceremonies require more priests and several sacrificial enclosures. In these rituals, the following sixteen priests officiate:

- (Atharvaveda) 1. Brahman (also in Agnyādheya, Darśapūrṇamāsa, Paśubandha)
 2. Brāhmaṇacchamsin
 3. Āgnīdhra or Agnīdh (also in Agnyādheya, Darśapūrṇamāsa, Paśubandha)
 4. Potā
 (Ṛgveda) 5. Hotā (also in Agnyādheya, Darśapūrṇamāsa, Paśubandha)

PLATE 2

Iḍā

After the hotā has invoked the goddess Iḍā, the adhvaryu places pieces of sacrificial puroḍāśa cakes, also called iḍā, in his right hand and in their wooden receptacle (iḍāpātram). They are touched by the yajamāna. This occurs in the middle of each iṣṭi offering. On the plate, the iṣṭi is the Introductory Offering (prāyaṇīyeṣṭi) on the fourth day (Episode 8): the yajamāna wears the turban he has received during his consecration (Episode 4) and will discard during the purchase of Soma (Episode 8).



PART I THE AGNICAYANA RITUAL

6. Maitrāvaruṇa (also in Paśubandha)
 7. Acchāvāka
 8. Grāvastut
 (Sāmaveda) 9. Udgātā
 10. Prastotā
 11. Pratihartā
 12. Subrahmaṇya
 (Yajurveda) 13. Adhvaryu (also in Agnihotra, Agnyādheya, Darśapūrṇamāsa, Paśubandha)
 14. Pratiprasthātā
 15. Neṣṭā
 16. Unnetā

Finally there is one optional priest:

17. Sadasya.

I have added the names of the four Vedas between parentheses because the affiliation of the priests to them is somewhat artificial, as we have already seen in connection with the assignment of the brahman and the āgnīdhra to the Atharvaveda. In practice, there are two groups, the Sāmavedins and the others.

In addition to the yajamāna, ten among these priests are called "cup-bearer" (*camasin*) because they have their own Soma cup (*camasa*). They are: hotā, maitrāvaruṇa, brāhmaṇacchamsin, potā, neṣṭā, acchāvāka, āgnīdhra, brahman, udgātā, and sadasya. Each of the cupbearers has an assistant (*camasādhvaryu*), who makes Soma oblations from the cupbearer's cup. The śastra recitations are performed by the first three and the sixth cupbearers, one at a time. Each of the śastra reciters has his own fire hearth, called *dhiṣṇya*. When he recites, he sits to the west of it, facing east. The āgnīdhra also has a hearth, on the northern boundary of the Mahāvedi. The three stotra chanters have their designated places to the west of the śastra reciters. The three chanters face north, west, and south.

In the Soma rituals, the ritual enclosure is extended by constructing inside the mahāvedi, between the new domestic altar and the new offering altar, two new enclosures, one for the chants and recitations, and one for the Soma. The first is the *sadas* or hall of recitation, in which all but one of the stotras are chanted, in which all the śastras are recited, and where the śastra reciters have their hearths. The second is the *havirdhāna* or *havirdhānamāṇḍapa*, a shed (*maṇḍapa*) with two havirdhāna ("oblation-receptacle") or Soma carts, where the preparation of the Soma takes place. The ground plan of the resulting structure is given in Figure 4.

There are several categories of Soma rituals, but we shall only be concerned with those that are called *ekāha*, "one-day." They are characterized by the fact that the pressing or pounding of the Soma takes place three times in the course of a single day. The three pressings are called morning pressing (*prātaḥ-*

2. THE AGNICAYANA IN CLASSICAL VEDIC RITUAL

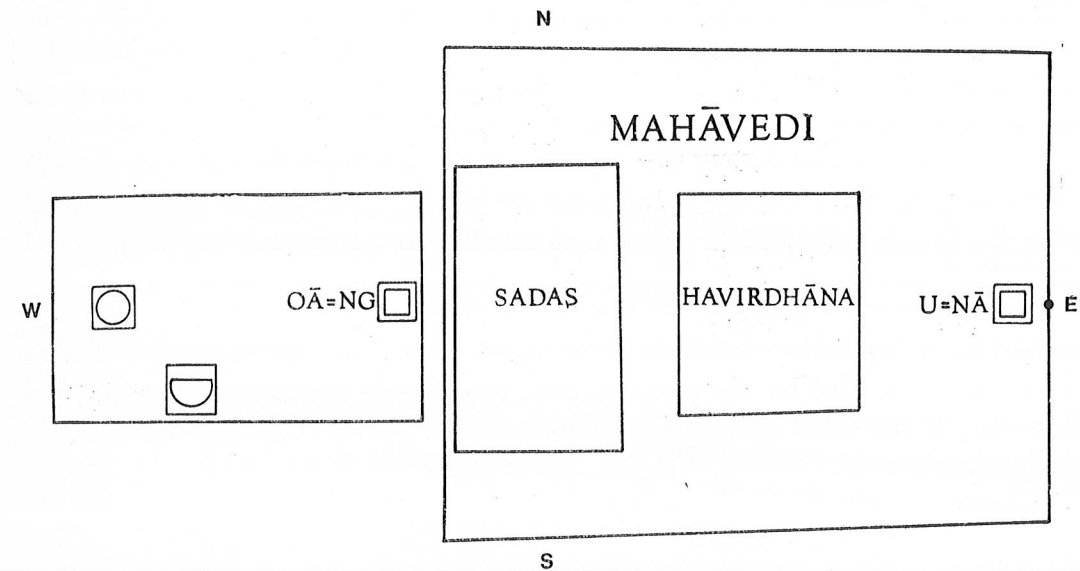


Figure 4—Ritual Enclosures for the Soma Rituals

- OĀ: old āhavanīya (old offering altar)
 = NG: new gārhapatya (new domestic altar)
 U: *uttaravedi*
 = NĀ: new āhavanīya (new offering altar)
 Sadas: hall of recitation
 Havirdhāna: hall for preparation of Soma, or Soma hall

savana), midday pressing (*mādhyaṇḍina-savana*), and (not evening pressing but) third pressing (*trītiya-savana*). This terminology suggests what in practice is a fact, namely that the multitude of accompanying rites and ceremonies may prevent the three pressings from being completed within a single day.

All Soma rituals, even those of the *ekāha* variety, last for several days because of numerous introductory, preparatory, and accompanying rites. The prototype and paradigm of these rites, the Agniṣṭoma, lasts five days, the three pressings taking place on the last day or "pressing day" (*sutyā*). During this last day there is also an animal sacrifice. The rites that occur on earlier days include consecration (*dīkṣā*) of the yajamāna, the ritual purchase of Soma stalks (*somakrayana*), the worship of Soma as a king, the consecration of the mahāvedi and its various contents, the carrying forth of Agni (*agnipraṇayana*) from the old offering altar (= the new domestic altar) to the new offering altar, the carrying forth of Agni and Soma in similar fashion (*agnīṣomapraṇayana*); and many others. There are also optional rites. The most important among these is the Pravargya, a pastoral ceremony in which offerings of boiled goat's and cow's milk are made to the Aśvin twins, divine young men who ride the wind. When this option is selected, the Pravargya rite takes place in the morning and evening during the second,

PART I THE AGNICAYANA RITUAL

third, and fourth day. It immediately precedes the *Upasad* rites, which take place at these times, and which are not optional. They are basically offerings and oblations of clarified butter. The Agnihotra, incidentally, should not be performed during these ceremonies.

On the last day of the Agniṣṭoma, there is a bath (*avabhṛtha*) for the yajamāna, his wife, and the priests. An *iṣṭi* is performed in the water instead of in the fire. Finally the enclosure with most of its contents is set on fire and consumed by Agni.

All these rites occur in all the Soma rituals. The Agniṣṭoma is characterized by a particular distribution of Soma sequences: there are five during the morning service on the pressing day, five during the midday service, and two during the third service. The chant of the twelfth and last sequence is called Agniṣṭoma, "praise of Agni," from which the entire ceremony derives its name.

There are six other ekāha Soma rituals. They can be briefly described as extensions of the Agniṣṭoma. Confining myself to those differences that relate to Soma sequences, I shall very briefly characterize three of these rituals, Ukthya, Ṣoḍaśin, and Atirātra (the names of the other three are given in Table 2).

In the Ukthya ritual (from *uktha*, an old name for the śastra recitation, in particular during the third service), three Soma sequences are added to the two Soma sequences of the third service of the Agniṣṭoma, bringing the total to fifteen, equally distributed among the three services.

In the Ṣoḍaśin ("sixteenth") ritual, which is dedicated to Indra, a sixteenth Soma sequence is added. It is shrouded in mystery and considered dangerous.

In the Atirātra ("overnight") ritual, three nightly rounds (*rātriparyāya*) are added, each consisting of four Soma sequences. This is followed by a final sequence, the twenty-ninth, which should be over before dawn. The last chant belonging to this sequence is called the *sandhi-stotra* "twilight chant." The accompanying śastra, called *āśvina-śastra*, is addressed to the Aśvin twins and consists of a thousand verses.

We are now in a position to approach the Agnicayana. This ritual is always combined with a Soma ritual. In the Agnicayana, a special role is played by a ritual vessel, the ukhā pot, made from clay and subsequently fired. The main characteristic of the Agnicayana is that the offering altar of the uttaravedi is constructed by piling up (*cayana*) fired clay bricks. There are five layers (*citi*), and the resulting altar can have various shapes, the most well known being the shape of a bird of prey (*śyena*). The new domestic altar is square and is also made of five layers of fired bricks. The construction of these altars involves numerous other rites.

When the Agnicayana is combined with the Atirātra Soma ritual, it is called Atirātra-Agnicayana or *Sāgnicitya-Atirātra*. This is the ritual that the Nambudiris celebrated in 1975.

Chapter 3. A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE AGNICAYANA

THE BRICK OFFERING altar of the Agnicayana, often simply called "Agni," assumes the function of the uttaravedi, and is therefore located inside the ritual enclosure, the bird facing east (see Figure 5). Since the enclosure has a

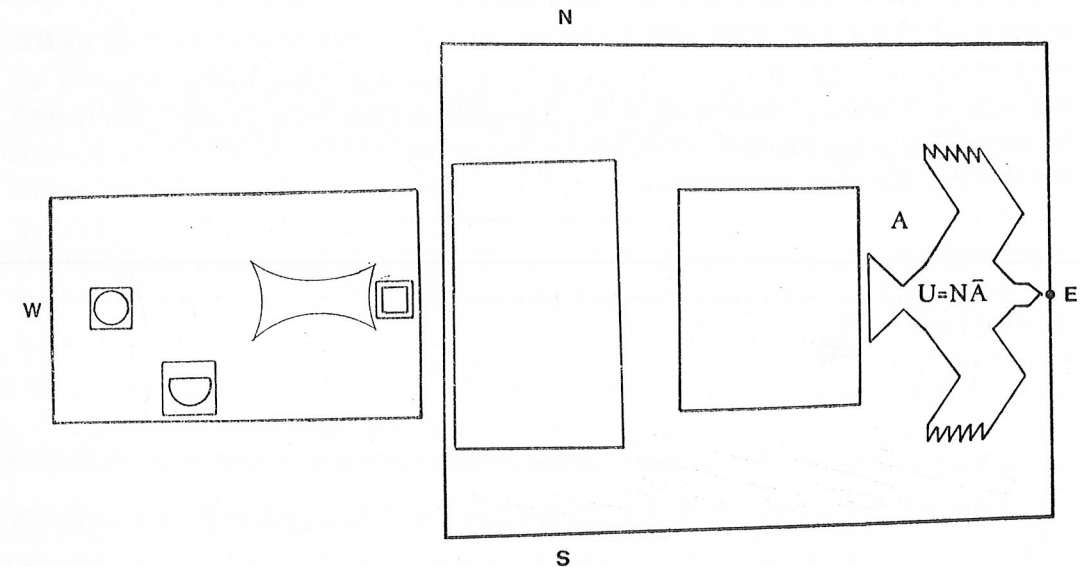


Figure 5—Ritual Enclosures for the Agnicayana

(for details, compare Figures 1-4)

roof that is about 15 feet high, and the span of the wings of the altar is about 40 feet, it is difficult to obtain a bird's-eye view of the altar. This is nevertheless what we shall try to do in the following pages. The description in this chapter will be based upon the classical manuals and not upon the 1975 performance. However, when options are mentioned in the texts, I have selected the option that was adopted in 1975, or the one closest to Nambudiri practice. This applies in particular to the duration of the ritual and to the distribution of rites over particular days. In the classical manuals this distribution is not always clear. The ceremonies described in the manuals sometimes last much longer than in the Nambudiri tradition. Some rites may be extended over a year. The 1975 performance lasted for twelve days. I shall describe the ritual day by day and concentrate on the main ritual moments without specifying any of the recitations or innumerable subordinate rites.

PART I THE AGNICAYANA RITUAL

FIRST DAY

The yajamāna and his priests enter the ritual enclosure, carrying the yajamāna's three sacred fires in pots. The ukhā pot, main ritual vessel of the Agnicayana, is prepared from clay, along with the heads of a horse, a man, a bull, a ram, and a he-goat, as well as a few of the bricks that will be used for the piling of the altar. An animal sacrifice is performed for Vāyu. The five chief priests (adhvaryu, brahman, hotā, udgātā, and sadasya) are officially selected. Fire is produced by friction. An iṣṭi is performed for the consecration (*dikṣaṇīyeṣṭi*) and is followed by the consecration (*dikṣā*) of the yajamāna. During this ceremony, the yajamāna crawls onto the skin of a black antelope, a turban is tied around his head, he is given a staff, and he closes his fists. From the consecration on the first day until the final bath on the twelfth day, the yajamāna should sit on the antelope skin and carry the staff. He should generally keep his fists closed and refrain from speaking (except for the prescribed recitations), from bathing, sexual intercourse, and certain kinds of food. The yajamāna picks up the ukhā pot, which is filled with fire, and takes three steps with it. He is protected by a golden breast plate.

SECOND DAY

The mahāvira pot, main ritual vessel of the Pravargya, is prepared from clay.

THIRD DAY

A tree is cut and a sacrificial pole is made from it. To the east of the old enclosure, in which the three altars have already been made, the measurements of the mahāvedi and of the bird-shaped offering altar are laid out.

FOURTH DAY

In the place of the old offering altar, the new domestic altar is constructed from bricks. The adhvaryu consecrates each brick on behalf of the yajamāna with mantras. The offering fire is installed on the domestic altar, and fire from the ukhā pot is added to it. An introductory iṣṭi (*prāyaṇīyeṣṭi*) is performed. Outside the enclosure, Soma stalks are purchased from a Soma merchant. They are measured, placed on a bullock skin, and transported on the Soma cart. King Soma is installed on a throne (*āsandī*) to the south of the new domestic = old offering altar, and a guest iṣṭi (*ātithyeṣṭi*) is performed in his honor. All priests, excluding the chanters, and the yajamāna sprinkle the Soma. The subrahmanya priest recites for the first time his invitation to Indra, gods, and brahmins, urging them to attend the forthcoming Soma pressing on the sutyā day. The first Pravargya and Upasad are performed.

3. A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE AGNICAYANA

Now the ground is prepared for constructing the offering altar. It is plowed and seeds are sown. Several items are buried in the ground, including a live tortoise, the ukhā pot, a golden image of a man (*hiraṇmaya-puruṣa*), and the five animal heads. The bricks, of various shapes and sizes, are placed on the ground in specific order, making up the first layer of the bird altar. A "naturally perforated" or "porous" brick or stone (*svayamātrṇṇā*) is placed in the center. All bricks are consecrated by the adhvaryu on behalf of the yajamāna. The Pravargya and Upasad follow.

FIFTH DAY

After the morning Pravargya and Upasad, the second layer is laid, followed by the evening Pravargya and Upasad.

SIXTH DAY

After the morning Pravargya and Upasad, the third layer is laid, with svayamātrṇṇā in the center, followed by the evening Pravargya and Upasad.

SEVENTH DAY

After the morning Pravargya and Upasad, the fourth layer is laid, followed by the evening Pravargya and Upasad.

EIGHTH DAY

After the morning Pravargya and Upasad, the fifth layer is laid, with svayamātrṇṇā in the center. The yajamāna wishes the bricks to turn into cows. A long continuous oblation of milk, sesame seed, and other substances is made for Rudra and the Rudras on the westernmost brick of the northern wing of the bird. The udgātā sings chants around the bird, and a strong man pours a continuous stream of water from a pitcher three times around the altar. The evening Pravargya and Upasad follow.

NINTH DAY

After morning and evening Pravargya and Upasad, the mahāvira pot and other implements used in the Pravargya are put down on the new offering altar in the shape of a man. Agni is carried forth from the new domestic to the new offering altar and is installed in the center of the bird altar or "Agni." A long, continuous oblation of clarified butter is made into the sacrificial fire through a large ladle (*praseka*). This oblation is called "flow of wealth" (*vasor dhārā*). It is followed by numerous other offerings and oblations. The sadas, the hall of recitation, is prepared along with its hearths. Now Agni and Soma are carried forth and the *Agniṣomiya* animal sacrifice is performed. The subrahmanya priest, standing between the yajamāna and his wife, chants for the last time his invitation to the Soma pressing.

PART I THE AGNICAYANA RITUAL

TENTH TO TWELFTH DAY

The tenth day is the *sutyā* or pressing day, and from now on ceremonies will continue throughout the next two days and nights. After the *hotā*'s morning recital (*prātaranuvāka*), which starts long before sunrise, the morning pressing of Soma begins, and the first Soma oblations are offered. The *prastotā* and *pratihatā* chanters join *adhvaryu*, *pratiprasthātā*, *udgātā*, *brahman*, and *yajamāna*, and all crawl in snakelike procession (*sarpaṇam*) onto the altar, where they make an oblation into the offering fire. They then move to a place to the north of the altar, the *āstāva*, where the three chanters sing their first chant, "the outdoor chant for the purified Soma" (*bahiṣpa-vamāna-stotra*). Numerous rites are performed, many simultaneously, overlapping and/or temporarily interrupted by others. Fires are installed on the hearths in the *sadas*. Eleven animals are sacrificed for Agni, Sarasvatī, Soma, Pūṣan, Bṛhaspati, the Viśvedevas, Indra, the Maruts, Indra-Agni, Savitā, and Varuṇa.

All priests, except the *Acchāvāka*, enter the *sadas* where the Soma juice is drunk. Soma offerings are made. The *acchāvāka* priest enters, and the *hotā* recites his first *śastra* recitation. The first Soma sequence over, four others are executed, each consisting of a *stotra* chant, a *śastra* recitation, Soma offering, and Soma drinking. From now on, all chants and recitations take place in the *sadas*. Soma offerings are made into the offering fire, and Soma is drunk in the *sadas*.

At the midday pressing, the *grāvastut* priest enters and recites, blindfolded with cloth in which the Soma was wrapped, *Ṛgveda* verses in praise of the pressing stones (*grāvan*). Five Soma sequences are gone through. Then the priests are offered *dakṣiṇa*, and the *yajamāna* is anointed (*abhiṣeka*) as in royal consecration.

After the third pressing, the remaining fourteen Soma sequences of the *Atirātra* are gone through. This takes up all of the eleventh day and night and is completed by dawn on the twelfth day. On this last day, the *unnetā* priest makes two copious Soma offerings for Indra. Ancestral and expiation rites are performed. The *yajamāna*, his wife, and the priests take the *avabhṛtha* bath, a concluding *iṣṭi* (*udayaniyeṣṭi*) is performed, and a final goat is sacrificed for Mitra-Varuṇa. The *yajamāna* returns home with his wife and the three fires, and he installs the fires on his altars so as to perform the evening and morning *Agnihotra* for the rest of his life as a householder.

Chapter 4. TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE AGNICAYANA

A COMMON BUT naive assumption about ritual is that ritual activities are always symbolic activities that refer to something else. This assumption is born from the observation that ritual is not always clearly functional or, in simple terms, that it often does not seem to make any sense. The difference, for example, between putting on clothes and tying a dhoti or buttoning a waistcoat in a special manner is a difference between a clearly functional activity and more or less ritual activities. While the ritualistic and obsessive attention to clothes is secular, it acquires mysterious significance as soon as religious overtones are added. When the *adhvaryu* spins around once before making a certain oblation, this is expected to have special significance. Yet it may be meaningless on any particular occasion. Such meaninglessness does not imply that rites have never had any meaning, do not have a cause, or do not possess significance in a wider context. But the cause need no longer be operative when the ritual is performed, and the original significance may be lost. This situation is similar to that in the realm of the etymology of words. Every word has an etymology, but it does not follow that the etymology is part of the meaning or function of the word. Moreover, words are often used without conveying any meaning.

The problem of the ritual act (*karman*) and its interpretation in terms of knowledge (*jñāna*, *vidyā*) has a long history in Indian religion and philosophy. In the classical ideal of the ritual texts, the two are closely connected. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 10.4.3.9, for example, says, with regard to the Agnicayana, "This fire altar is knowledge (*vidyā*) and this fire altar is act (*karman*)" (cf., Heesterman 1964, 22, note 40). In the Upaniṣads, *karman* and *vidyā* or *jñāna* are clearly distinguished. The main purport of the Upaniṣadic teachings is that *karman* by itself is ineffectual, and that *jñāna* or *vidyā* is all that counts. Accordingly, the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads are contrasted as *karmakāṇḍa*, "the part of śruti that relates to ritual," and *jñānakāṇḍa*, "the part of śruti that relates to knowledge," respectively. This contrast continues to play an important role in Indian philosophy. The Mīmāṃsā, for example, emphasizes ritual activity in conformity with the Śrauta Sūtras (which describe it) and the Brāhmaṇas (which interpret it), just as the Vedānta emphasizes knowledge in conformity with the Upaniṣads.

In asking for interpretations of the Agnicayana, we should be clear about whose interpretations we are seeking. I shall distinguish between interpretations by the present-day performers, traditional interpretations as offered in the classical texts, and modern interpretations by scholars who look for origins and significance in terms of history, society, religion, philosophy, or in similar perspectives. The present chapter deals with the first two kinds of

PART I THE AGNICAYANA RITUAL

interpretation, with special emphasis on the traditional interpretations found in the classical texts. The next chapter, Chapter 5, will be concerned with modern interpretations.

The present-day performers, when engaged in ritual, are totally immersed in the proper execution of their complex tasks. They concentrate on correctness of recitation and of act. There are no symbolic meanings going through their minds when they are engaged in performing ritual. But even when not actually engaged in the performance of a ritual, they do not feel that the ritual stands in need of a special interpretation. Like the reciters of the Veda, they are not concerned with meaning. They are interested in ritual meaning, or *vinīyoga*, viz., in knowing what recitations and what acts should be combined when and where. Beyond this, there is a sense of occasion that expresses the general social, religious, and cultural function of the performance, cements the community of performers more closely together, and confers a degree of status and prestige on its members. There is also awareness of the discharge of a responsibility to the ancestors, who have preserved the ritual through their past performance. For an eligible brahmin to break the chain of transmission would result in a feeling of failure if not of guilt. Furthermore, there are, or rather there used to be, economic incentives (to which I shall return in Chapter 6, with special reference to the Nambudiri community). In short, for the performers, the meaning of the ritual lies in its celebration, which strengthens the present position of the community, its ties with the past, and its promise for the future. Finally, there are those special ritual qualities that induce people all over the world to immerse themselves in the correct execution of ritual in the appropriate place and at the appropriate time, and in such a manner as to derive satisfaction from it. Like the child in its playpen, man feels secure and enjoys being in the separate world of his sacrificial enclosure. But this is not the place to elucidate these qualities, which await analysis in a general theory of ritual.

Just as in the case of the Vedic recitations, there is a simple reason for treating rituals in modern times as almost meaningless: their original meaning has long been lost, and their religious, social, and economic function in Hindu society is no longer what it used to be during the Vedic period. Moreover, an interpretation of Vedic ritual in terms of contemporary Hinduism is not easy. Though the performers are practicing Hindus, Vedic ritual has no close links with the Hinduism that developed in post-Vedic times, e.g., worship of images of deities, temples, pilgrimages, ascetic practices. Present-day performances show at most that Hindu practices and the Vedic heritage can coexist (see the Preface to Volume II). Thus, during the 1975 performance, some of the Nambudiri priests started their daily office with a simple act of worship in front of a lamp, placed inside the sacrificial enclosure. This is a prominent feature of Hinduism in Kerala. It is also Nambudiri custom not to enter upon the performance of a Vedic ritual without first making offerings in temples to Hindu deities such as Dakṣiṇāmūrti and

4. TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATIONS

Gaṇapati. The Vedic brahmins in Tanjore District (Tamilnad) have gone one step further in regarding Vedic ritual as the worship of a deity called Yajñeśvara, "God of Ritual." Before the performance of an Atyagniṣṭoma (one of the seven varieties of Soma rituals), which took place in Tanjore District in 1962, a printed announcement was distributed inviting the orthodox to witness the ritual and obtain the blessings (*prasāda*) of Śrī Yajñeśvara. Thus the ritual is incorporated into the structure of Hinduism. Similarly, villagers who came to see the Nambudiri performance of 1975 wished to make a circumambulation and offerings to receive the blessings and to obtain *darśan*, "a glimpse," of the presiding deity.¹

The aura of mystery that pervades ritual is often due to the fact that its meaning is not known, or is no longer known. This leads in turn to postulating a mystical knowledge that unravels the mystery by finding access to its essence. Such attitudes can be traced back at least as far as the Brāhmaṇas, which frequently assert that he "who knows thus" (*ya evaṃ veda*), or who, "knowing thus" (*evaṃ vidvān*), performs rites, shall obtain results (cf. Edgerton 1929, 99). This suggests that there were brahmins who did not know thus. It also paved the way for the Upaniṣads, which sought to provide this special kind of secret knowledge.

At least one ancient ritualist, Kautsa—first mentioned in the Nirukta (a work on etymology of approximately the sixth century B.C.)—took the bull by the horns and declared the mantras meaningless. This should not be interpreted in terms of scepticism, positivism, or behaviorism. It is a purely ritualistic move that limits the function of mantras to their ritual use. In order to understand Kautsa's position one should visualize an actual ritual performance. When the blindfolded grāvastut priest recites his Ṛgveda verses at the midday pressing, he is, in fact—and as his name indicates—addressing the pressing stones. But how, asked Kautsa, can a person in his right mind address inanimate objects? In point of fact, mantras do not merely address stones and herbs; they also refer to things that do not exist (e.g., a being with four horns, three feet, two heads, and seven hands); they are redundant and self-contradictory (e.g., one mantra asserts: "There is only one Rudra, there never was a second", and another refers to "the innumerable thousands of Rudras"); and lastly there is a tradition for mantras to be learned by heart, but there is no corresponding teaching of their meaning.

Kautsa concluded from these observations that mantras are meaningless (*anarthakā mantrāḥ*) and are only meant to be recited (see, e.g., Mīmāṃsā Sūtra 1.2.4.34–38). Though Kautsa's views were criticized in the Nirukta, in the philosophical system of the Mīmāṃsā, and elsewhere, they are not so very different from the perspective of orthodox Hinduism. The philosopher Śaṅkara, for example, approvingly quotes a Brāhmaṇa text that declares: "he who teaches a mantra or officiates at a ritual with mantras without

¹ A fact that was grossly misunderstood by an American anthropologist. See Paul 1978, Staal 1979b and Volume II, page 474.

PART I THE AGNICAYANA RITUAL

knowing the composer-seer (ṛṣi), the meter, the deity, and the brāhmaṇa, will run his head against a pole or fall into a pit" (Vedānta Sūtra Bhāṣya 1.3.30). It is to be noted that knowledge of meaning is not required here. All that is demanded are certain formal data that are transmitted together with the recitations. The brāhmaṇa itself, which provides the traditional interpretation and viniyoga, is merely another recited text. Kane, who quotes this passage from Śaṅkara, arrives at a view that is not inconsistent with it: "It appears that from ancient times the Veda was only committed to memory and most men learned in the Veda never cared to know its meaning" (Kane 1941, II, 358).

The Vedic tradition is therefore, in theory and practice, consistent with the popular view that ritual is magic and that mantras are mysterious gibberish: *Il s'est ainsi accrédité l'idée d'un lien entre le mantra védique et la magie, et dans l'usage populaire le mantra, quelle qu'en soit l'origine, est avant tout un abracadabra* (Renou 1960, 21). It is useful to bear this in mind when engaging upon the study of mantras as aids to meditation (*dhiyālamba*), one of their primary functions in later times, e.g., in Tantrism (cf. Staal 1975, s.v. *Manṛta*).

While the idea that mantras and rituals are meaningless expresses an important feature of ritual, its explicit formulation has always been rare. This is as it should be, for it would be misleading to conclude that there is no point in performing ritual. Ritual has significance, but its significance is generally quite different from what it is said to be. This will become more apparent in the next chapter, but it is visible even in the ritual interpretations of the classical texts. The śrauta sūtras are not part of this tradition. As we have seen, they do not interpret the ritual. They presuppose its interpretation and confine themselves to its description. In later times this trend continues in the Mīmāṃsā, which is concerned with ritual primarily in terms of a system of duties (*dharma*), classified as obligatory and optional (see Subrahmanya Sastri on Agnicayana in the Mīmāṃsā, in Part III, pages 177–192).

The Vedic works that are primarily concerned with ritual interpretation are the Brāhmaṇas, the Āraṇyakas, and the early Upaniṣads. The authors of these works were probably more scholars than performers, though it is obvious that, in most cases, they had a thorough knowledge of ritual practice. The rituals themselves had become increasingly complex. This kept the performers busy and provided plenty of material for ritualists with a speculative bent of mind. It led to a great variety of imaginative interpretations, and it is not surprising that the Upaniṣads, the last link in this chain of interpretation, are also the beginnings of Indian philosophy.

The realm of ritual interpretation and speculation is a labyrinth, and if we do not want to get lost, we shall have to follow a thread. I shall therefore, from now on, become more specific and confine myself to interpretations of the Agnicayana. It will be helpful to review briefly the relevant texts. In the R̥gveda, the Agnicayana is not mentioned. By the time of the Yajurveda,

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at most a few centuries later, it has become the most inclusive of all rituals. The Taittirīya Saṃhitā devotes approximately two of its seven *kāṇḍas* to it, and the Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā eight *adhyāyas* out of forty. The mantra section of the Taittirīya Saṃhitā, which deals with the Agnicayana (*kāṇḍa* 4 and some sections of *kāṇḍa* 5), contains most of the mantras that are recited during its performance in the Taittirīya tradition. The corresponding brāhmaṇa sections (most of *kāṇḍa* 5) offer observations on the meaning of the mantras and of ritual activities that accompany the mantras. Since these are the earliest traditional interpretations of episodes of the Agnicayana, I shall illustrate them with two simple examples.

When the ukhā pot is made, it is addressed with the mantra: "You are the head of Makha" (Taittirīya Saṃhitā 4.1.5.31). The corresponding brāhmaṇa explains this by informing us that Makha is the ritual, and the ukhā pot its head (Taittirīya Saṃhitā 5.1.6.10). Similarly, during the preparation of the ukhā pot, breast-shaped protuberances are made around its periphery. The brāhmaṇa (Taittirīya Saṃhitā 5.1.6.17–19) explains their number: two breasts are to give milk to sky and earth; four breasts to give milk to cattle; and eight breasts to give milk to the meters (of which there are eight kinds).

Most interpretations found in the brāhmaṇa sections of the Taittirīya Saṃhitā are of this kind. They are piecemeal, ad hoc, and not very illuminating. One looks in vain for an interpretation in a broader context or of larger units, or for an explanation of their structure and interrelationships. Such interpretations are sometimes given in the Brāhmaṇas, and particularly in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa. This work is attributed to a sage, Yājñavalkya, who is often mentioned in its first five *kāṇḍas*, and again in the later *kāṇḍas*. The intervening *kāṇḍas*—6 through 10, which seem to be of later date (see below, page 98), and which constitute more than one third of the work—are attributed to another sage, Śaṇḍilya. These *kāṇḍas* deal with the interpretation of the Agnicayana. The tenth *kāṇḍa* is called *Agnirahasya*, "the secret of Agni," i.e., the secret of the Agnicayana according to Śaṇḍilya. This has, in some respects, the character of an Upaniṣad, which is in turn consistent with the fact that a traditional interpretation of the term upaniṣad is *rahasya*, "secret (teaching)."

The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa is of later date than the Taittirīya Saṃhitā and belongs to a different branch of the Yajurveda. There is no guarantee, therefore, that its interpretation is also implicit in the Taittirīya Saṃhitā. Keith (1914, cxxv–cxxxi) has attempted to distinguish between the Agnicayana doctrines of the two texts, but such an attempt is bound to remain speculative because of their difference in character, and also because the Taittirīya Saṃhitā does not offer any explicit doctrine. However, given the ready availability of Keith's translation of the Taittirīya Saṃhitā (first published in 1914 and reprinted in 1967) and the importance of this text for the Agnicayana, a word of caution is in order.

In Keith's translation, many portions of the Taittirīya Saṃhitā (mantra

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as well as brāhmaṇa sections) read like the babblings of a child or the ravings of a madman. This impression is strengthened by Keith's treatment of the text as if it were precisely that. Keith's introduction and notes, though exceedingly useful, also abound in remarks such as, "the aridity of constant quibbles and meaningless explanations is relieved only by occasional, and always very brief, references to real life" (clviii). One wonders why so much effort was spent on such a thankless task by the tireless Sanskritist and "eminent authority on the British Commonwealth and Indian constitutions" (as Nehru called Keith in Chapter VIII of *The Discovery of India*).

In point of fact, the character of Keith's translation is partly due not merely to peculiarities of his archaic style but also to mistakes. This was demonstrated by Caland in a review that appeared in 1924, and concluded: "From all that has been said it is clear that this translation of the Taittirīya Saṃhitā can only be used with extreme criticism" (*Aus all dem Gesagten geht hervor, dass diese Übersetzung der Taittirīyasamhitā nur mit der schärfsten Kritik zu benutzen ist*: Caland 1924, 31). I shall give five examples of Keith's erroneous interpretations, translating from Caland's German text.

According to Keith, TS 2.6.2.4 means: "The ox feeds with the first half, the cow feeds with the second half." Caland translates: "The use of the ox lies in its front half (which pulls carts), the use of the cow in its back half (which yields milk)." Similarly, TS 2.5.7.3: "Seed is deposited in front, offspring are born at the back" (Keith), versus "Seed is deposited in the forward direction, children are born in the reverse direction" (Caland). TS 5.4.7.6: "From the half filled Prajāpati created the creatures" (Keith), vs. "from the empty (womb) Prajāpati created the creatures" (Caland). TS 6.5.6.4: "Therefore the raw milks the cooked" (Keith), vs. "Therefore the raw (material, viz., the cow) yields the matured (viz., milk)" (Caland). TS 6.5.6.5: "From that which is not depressed offspring are produced (Keith), vs. "From the erected (penis) children are born" (Caland). No wonder that Keith—deploring the absence of "references to real life," but himself unable to recognize even the basic facts of life—comes up with statements like: "The Taittirīya cannot be credited with any intelligible theory of the nature of the supreme deity. . . . On the other hand the Śatapatha shows a really developed theory of the nature of mind. . . ." (Introduction cxxix).

As a matter of fact, the intelligibility of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa doctrine of the Agnicayana is largely due to Eggeling, who translated the text of this Brāhmaṇa in the Sacred Books of the East Series (1882–1900, reprinted 1963, second edition 1966), and who summarized its interpretation of the Agnicayana in the Introduction to his fourth volume (1897, xiii–xxvii). Eggeling's outlook was hardly more favorable than Keith's. Speaking of the Brāhmaṇas in general, he says: "For wearisome prolixity of exposition, characterized by dogmatic assertion and a flimsy symbolism rather than by serious reasoning, these works are perhaps not equalled anywhere" (I, ix). And yet, Eggeling made a lot of sense of it. Gonda (1960, 191, note 16 = 1965,

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17–18, note 36) sums up a lengthy scholarly controversy by pointing out that Oldenberg's criticism of Eggeling's basically intelligible views has for a long time, and in spite of Keith, prevented an adequate interpretation of the Agnicayana. I shall be guided by Eggeling in the following sketch of Śāṇḍilya's interpretation of the Agnicayana.

According to Śāṇḍilya's teaching in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, the construction of the Agnicayana altar is essentially the restoration of Prajāpati, the creator god, who created the world through self-sacrifice, viz., through his own dismemberment. Since Prajāpati became the universe, his restoration is at the same time the restoration of the universe. Thus, piling up the altar means putting the world together again. Just as Prajāpati was the original sacrificer, Agni is the divine sacrificer, and the yajamāna is the human sacrificer. The designation of the fire altar as Agni indicates the identity of Agni and Prajāpati. Agni, Prajāpati, and the yajamāna are all identified with each other, with the offering altar, and with the fire installed on it. The ukhā pot also represents the fire altar: it is made when the bricks are made, and fire is carried in it by the yajamāna, just as fire is installed on the offering altar.

Prajāpati is also identified with the man (*puruṣa*) in the sun, which is also both the man in the (right) eye and the golden man (*hiraṇmayapurūṣa*) buried under the first layer, who represents Agni-Prajāpati and the yajamāna. Above this golden man are the "naturally perforated" (*svayamātrṇṇā*) pebbles, in the first, third, and fifth layers, which enable him to breathe, and which represent the three worlds (earth, air, and sky) through which he will have to pass on his way to the fourth, invisible world of immortality. All the bricks of the altar are animated by Prajāpati putting breath in them. Thus the bird comes to life, and with the restoration of Agni-Prajāpati, the yajamāna gains immortality.

The Brāhmaṇa proceeds with more identifications, following the doctrines of Śāṇḍilya. Prajāpati is the sacrifice and food of the gods; Soma is the supreme oblation; hence Prajāpati is Soma. Soma was brought from heaven by a bird of prey (*śyena*). Accordingly, Prajāpati and Puruṣa, both generally conceived of in the shape of a man, also assume the shape of a bird. This is further explained by the doctrine of the original seven seers (*ṛṣi*), identified with the "vital airs" (*prāṇa*), i.e., with life, each in the shape of a puruṣa. These seven puruṣas were combined into one Puruṣa, which is Prajāpati and has the shape of a bird. These seven-and-a-half constituents are clearly visible in one form of the fire altar (Figure 6, after Eggeling 1894, III, 419.)¹ Each of these seven areas is called puruṣa, a term that acquires geometrical meaning in the context of altar construction (see Seidenberg in Part III, pages 95–126). The four squares in the middle are together called *ātman*, "body"

¹ The dotted lines in the wings and tail were probably put in by Eggeling, interpreting Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 10.2.1.1–8. But this text might refer to the bend in the wings we find in the Śulva sūtras (see, e.g., Figure 7; A. Seidenberg, personal communication).

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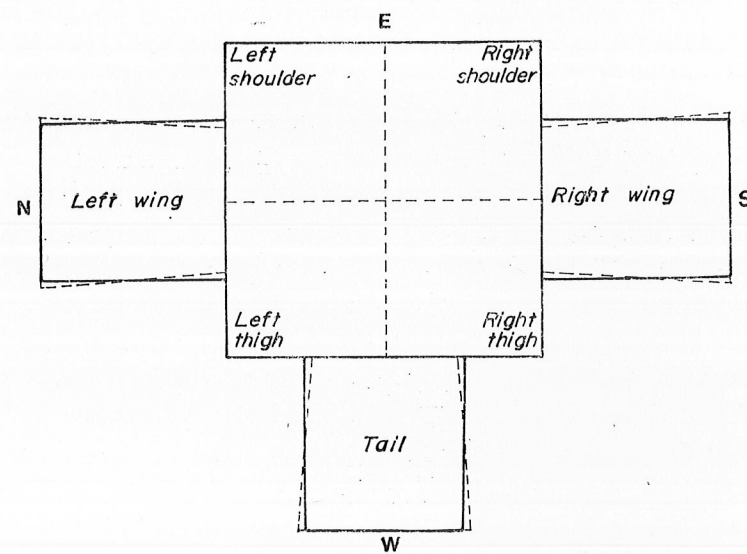


Figure 6—Fire Altar of the Agnicayana

The seven-and-a-half *puruṣa* squares according to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (after Eggeling)

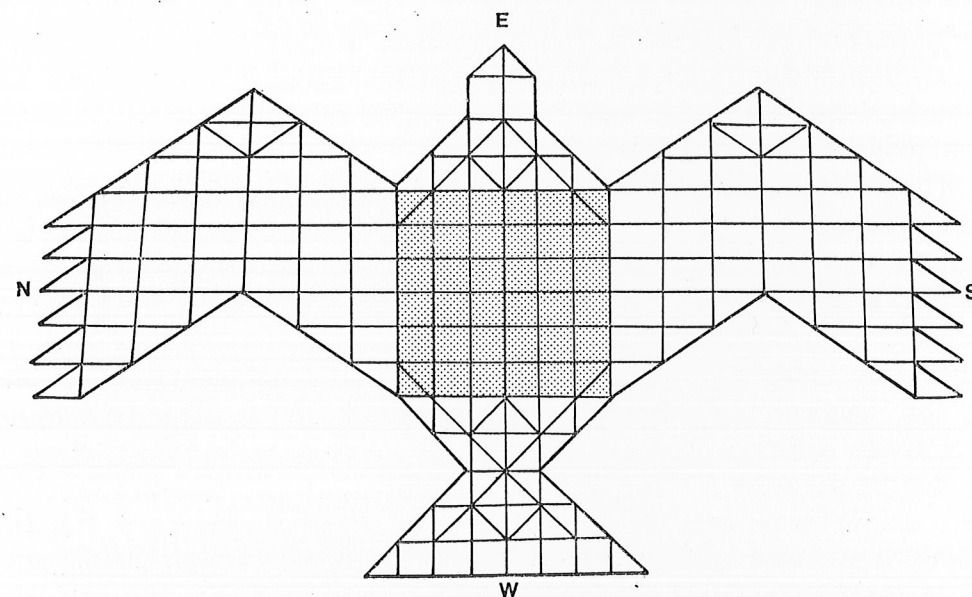


Figure 7—Bird-Shaped Fire Altar of the Agnicayana

The largest square within the altar is its *ātman*, "body", or "self."

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or "self." The term also refers to the largest square within the bird-shaped form of the fire altar, the shaded area in Figure 7.

The identifications that Śāṇḍilya presents to us may baffle us, but—pace Eggeling and Keith—they are not any more meaningless, dogmatic, or flimsy than the constructions found in other religious traditions that conceive of a deity in different forms. Moreover, these theological constructs are not entirely arbitrary. There are rules to the game, and their presumed neglect may lead to differences of opinion and interpretation. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, for example, mentions ancient authorities who adhered to the view that the altar has the shape of a bird in order to carry the yajamāna to heaven. Śāṇḍilya disagreed with this and insisted on a more roundabout interpretation: the vital airs became Prajāpati by assuming the shape of a bird; by assuming that form, Prajāpati created the gods; by assuming that form, the gods became immortal; "and what thereby the vital airs, and Prajāpati, and the gods became, that indeed he (the yajamāna) thereby becomes" (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 6.1.2.36).

Prajāpati has many other forms. One of his animal manifestations is the tortoise, which represents juice (*rasa*; cf. below page 121). When the tortoise is buried under the altar, juice is bestowed on Agni, and rain and fertility are induced. But Prajāpati also possesses abstract features. He is time, and is in particular identified with the year. Hence the Agnicayana takes a year to complete. After the yajamāna has generated Agni in the womb of the ukhā pot, he carries him around for a year before he is born on the sacrificial altar. The yajamāna himself is also in the womb (he closes his fists like an embryo), and the domestic altar is a womb. The sand strewn on it is the seed of Agni Vaiśvānara, "Agni common to all men." When carrying Agni from the domestic to the offering altar, the yajamāna enters the world of the gods, is reborn in heaven, and gains immortality.

These interpretations take us from the Agnicayana to the Soma rituals, and illustrate the embedding of the former in the latter. In the Soma rituals, the original enclosure with its three fires represents the world of men, and the mahāvedi, newly constructed to its east, is the world of the gods. All principal śrauta rituals are provided with such interpretations in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa and the other Brāhmaṇas, though none with anything as sweeping as Śāṇḍilya's metaphysics of the Agnicayana. It would take us too far to even sketch some of these interpretations of other śrauta rituals. Let me only mention that the stotra chants and śastra recitations of the Soma rituals are regarded as the weapons of Prajāpati (the word śastra is a homonym which may be derived from *śams-*, "recite" or from *śas-*, "cut down"). According to the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa (2.69, quoted in Gonda 1960, 196) Prajāpati himself became immortal only after he understood the mystical connection between the stotra chants and śastra recitations.

Though many of the interpretations of the Agnicayana found in the Brāhmaṇas, and especially in the Śatapatha, are obvious rationalizations,

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they continue to inspire scholars (e.g., Silburn 1955, 64–71; Malamoud 1975). In India, they were further developed in the Upaniṣads. As Ikari has shown, the five layers of the altar are connected with the five “sheaths” of the soul in the psychology of the Taittiriya Upaniṣad (Ikari, personal communication). Śāṇḍilya’s doctrines were destined to have a great future in the Upaniṣads and the Vedānta. The yajamāna’s identity with Prajāpati and with the fire altar, the center of which is called its “body” or “self” (ātman: see Figure 7), was generalized into the identity of ātman and brahman in every human being, which is one of the cornerstones of Indian philosophy. A sage called Śāṇḍilya, possibly the same Śāṇḍilya discussed above, makes a brief appearance in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad (3.14) to proclaim the identity of ātman and brahman, and to give a characterization of brahman in positive terms, which contrasts with its negative characterization by Yājñavalkya in other Upaniṣads. In these contexts there is no longer mention of the Agnicayana, but the Agnicayana is still the background against which Śāṇḍilya formulates his doctrine toward the end of the Agnirahasya (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 10.6.3.1–2, in Eggeling’s translation):

1. Let him meditate upon the ‘true Brahman.’ Now, man here, indeed, is possessed of understanding, and according to how great his understanding is when he departs this world, so does he, on passing away, enter yonder world.

2. Let him meditate on the Self, which is made up of intelligence, and endowed with a body of spirit, with a form of light, and with an ethereal nature, which changes its shape at will, is swift as thought, of true resolve, and true purpose, which consists of all sweet odours and tastes, which holds sway over all the regions and pervades this whole universe, which is speechless and indifferent;—even as a grain of rice, or a grain of barley, or a grain of millet, or the smallest granule of millet, so is this golden Puruṣa in the heart; even as a smokeless light, it is greater than the sky, greater than the ether, greater than the earth, greater than all existing things;—that self of the spirit is my self: on passing away from hence I shall obtain that self. Verily, whosoever has this trust, for him there is no uncertainty. Thus spoke Śāṇḍilya, and so it is.

Later Upaniṣads carry these ideas further, and the Agnicayana is still referred to occasionally. The Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad of the Black Yajurveda opens with the statement: “The piling (of the fire altar) by the ancients is a brahman-ritual; therefore the yajamāna, having piled these fires, should contemplate the self (ātman)” (*brahmayajño vā eṣa yat pūrveṣāṃ cayanaṃ tasmād yajamānaḥ citvaitān agnīn ātmānam abhidhyāyet*). Van Buitenen, who has provided an ingenious analysis of the composite character of this Upaniṣad, translates the first line as: “The laying of the fire by the ancient (*sic*)

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was a brahman-sacrifice” (Van Buitenen 1962, 37, 123). According to him (37; cf. 14, note 3), “the *cayana* is as the context in 6.33 ff. and the plural *agnīn etān* (‘these fires’) show not the great Agnicayana ritual but the *Agnyādhāna*, to which much of the Agnicayana symbolism is transferred.” But *cayana*, “piling up,” in the context of altars, is always used for brick altars, and the term *agni* frequently refers to the fire altar of the Agnicayana and not to the *Agnyādhāna* or *Agnyādheya*. The plural *agnīn*, “fires,” may denote many Agnicayanas, but it is also consistent with one Agnicayana, for, as we have seen, the ritual is always combined with a Soma ritual, and involves several altars, of which two are piled up from bricks. Moreover, if the reference were to anything else than the Agnicayana, it would be necessary to assume that not only the *symbolism* of the Agnicayana but also its bricks and many other specific characteristics were transferred. When substance and meaning are both transferred to something else, we had better abandon the hypothesis of transference itself and accept the fact that it is the Agnicayana that is referred to. The substance of the Agnicayana, in addition to its symbolism, is clearly referred to in Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad 6.33, which van Buitenen translates as follows:

This fire, made of five bricks, is the Year. Its bricks are spring, summer, rains, autumn, winter. It has a head, two wings, a back and a tail: (thus) this fire is like a man. This earth is Prajāpati’s first laying. Having thrown up the yajamāna with its hands, it proffered him to Wind.

Wind equals Prāṇa. This fire is prāṇa. Its bricks are prāṇa, vyāna, apāna, samāna, udāna. It has a head, two wings, a back and a tail. (Thus) this fire is like a man. The atmosphere is Prajāpati’s second laying. Having thrown up the yajamāna with its hands, it proffered him to Indra.

Indra is yonder sun. This fire is the sun. Its bricks are Ṛc, Yajus, Sāman, the Atharvāṅgirasas, the epic and purāṇa. It has a head, two wings, a back and a tail. (Thus) this fire is like a man. This sky is Prajāpati’s third laying. With its hands it makes an offering of the yajamāna to the ātman-knower. The ātman-knower, having thrown him up, proffered him to the Brahman. There he becomes blissful, joyful.

(van Buitenen 1962, 148)

This passage abounds in references to the *Agnicayana* that do not fit any other ritual. Agni “made of bricks” is not fire, but the fire altar. Apart from bricks (*iṣṭakā*), there is mention of *citi*, which means “layer,” not “laying.” The five bricks stand for the five layers of the altar, and the three *citis* of Prajāpati are the first, the third, and the fifth layer, which are identified with the three worlds. All the other identifications are well known

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correspondences with which we are familiar from the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa and elsewhere. If a single proof were needed that this Agni is the fire altar of the Agnicayana, the information that it has "a head, two wings, a back, and a tail" should be sufficient. The fire altar occurs also in other Upaniṣads of the Black Yajurveda. Harold Arnold has drawn my attention to the second valli of the Taittirīyopaniṣad, where we find a person (puruṣa) with two wings and a tail.

According to Bodewitz (1973, 278–283, 322), Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad 1.1 and 6.33 do not refer to the "actual" Agnicayana or Agnyādhāna but to the Prāṇāgnihotra and/or to Agnicayana speculations, or the "mental" Agnicayana. I shall leave the Prāṇāgnihotra aside. Since it is the special topic of the second part of Bodewitz' book, the author is predisposed to see it everywhere. However, the reference to the Agnicayana is not very clear. According to Bodewitz (278), "the actual piling of the fire does not seem to form the aim of this upaniṣad. It was the symbolism of the fire altar and the speculations vaguely connected with it (as e.g., found in ŚB) which interested the author of the text." But this goes without saying. The actual performance of śrauta ritual is always dealt with only in the śrauta sūtras. Interpretations and speculations are taken up in brāhmaṇas and upaniṣads. This does not imply that such interpretations do not refer to "actual" ritual activities, but that they do so indirectly since they presuppose such activities.

If it is true that in these passages of the Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad, Agni refers to the Agnicayana, this has further implications for the interpretation of this Upaniṣad, and casts doubt on some parts of van Buitenen's analysis. According to van Buitenen, Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad 1.2–5.2 existed originally as a separate text that was later incorporated into another text, the result being the Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad as we know it. The inserted portion consists essentially of two parts: the Bṛhadratha Instruction, which is "obviously Buddhist in tone" (van Buitenen 1962, 78), and the Vāḥhilya Instruction, "of proto-Sāṃkhyan provenance" (80). According to van Buitenen, neither of these fits naturally into the framework of what he has called the Vulgate.

While this may be true of the Bṛhadratha Instruction, it is much less clear in the case of the Vāḥhilya Instruction. This portion of the text (2.3–3.2, omitting what van Buitenen regards as still later interpolations) starts with Prajāpati being asked to explain brahman-knowledge (*brahma-vidyā*). More specifically, he is asked to explain why this body (*śarīra*), which is without intelligence, is furnished with a foundation (*pratiṣṭhāpita*), acquires intelligence (*cetanā*), and finally, who sets it into motion (*pracodayitā*). Prajāpati's basic answer is that it is he, Prajāpati, seeing everything (*viśvākṣa*), who as Puruṣa enters into each body: "This intelligent being furnishes a foundation to the body, so that it has intelligence, and he sets the body in motion" (2.4).

Next, Prajāpati's creation is described in more detail. Prajāpati created many beings, but saw that they remained unconscious like stones and

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without breath like tree trunks. Thereupon, having made himself as the wind, he entered them. He did not enter as one. He divided himself into five. These five are further specified in what van Buitenen regards as a later insertion: they are the five breaths, *prāṇa*, *apāna*, *samāna*, *udāna*, and *vyāna*. Finally this Prajāpati, who has entered the body, is declared to be ātman, and when he is in the body, he is called *bhūtātman*, "the incarnate self."

Though some of these formulations sound more recent, the doctrine of the Vāḥhilya section taken as a whole is similar to traditional speculations about Prajāpati in the Agnicayana. Let me illustrate this with the help of references to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa. Prajāpati is mortal and immortal: his body (*śarīra*) is mortal and his breaths (*prāṇāḥ*) are immortal (10.1.4.1). His five breaths—*prāṇa*, *apāna*, *vyāna*, *udāna*, and *samāna*—are the five layers of the altar (10.1.4.2–6). Thereby these parts of him become immortal.

Elsewhere it is said that the breaths departed from Prajāpati after he had created. Hence some of the bricks are called *prāṇabhṛt*, "supporters of breath" (8.1.1.3). Specific bricks, thus animated, are further identified with the five breaths (8.1.3.6). When Prajāpati wants to become everything, he becomes breath, in particular that breath which blows here, viz., the wind, which manifests his sight (*dr̥ṣṭi*) (11.1.6.17). The breath that went out of him is the wind (7.1.2.5; similarly 6.2.2.11, 8.3.4.11 and 15). In 6.3.1.12, Prajāpati is supplied as the subject for the Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā 11.1: "Harnessing first the mind (*manas*)."¹ Prajāpati is also the meter of the mind (8.5.2.3). Without Prajāpati there is no firm foundation; he is the foundation (*pratiṣṭhā*) (7.1.2.1–2). Lastly, for the connections with ātman and brahman and their intelligence aspects, I need merely refer to 10.6.3.1–2 from the Agnirahasya, already quoted (above, page 68).

Some of these similarities are not literal and verbal, which might displease a philologist. However, notwithstanding the demands of lower and higher textual criticism (van Buitenen, 14), one should be allowed to do some thinking. I am not interested in trying to show that any parts of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa are also constituents of the text of the Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad. What is clear from these similarities, however, is that the Vāḥhilya Instruction, in spite of apparent proto-Sāṃkhyan features, fits quite naturally in a treatise on the brahman-ritual of the Agnicayana. Just as Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad 1.1 and 6.33, the Vāḥhilya Instruction exhibits features that belong to the complex of traditional interpretations of the Agnicayana. Therefore, different parts of the Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad fit together much better than van Buitenen has made us believe. And finally, the plurality of animated bricks is just as undeniable as the plurality of animated bodies, so why could the pluralistic philosophy of the Sāṃkhya not be directly grafted upon the bricks of the fire altar?

If van Buitenen has gone too far in his dissecting activity, the blame should not primarily go to him but to his uncritical acceptance of philology, and to philology itself. He unhesitatingly accepts its credo: "From the point

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of view of style and composition the Vāḷakhilya Story constitutes a separate and independent text. It is *prima facie* evident that whenever two instructions by different persons in different circumstances are found together in one text, at least one of them, and probably both, existed independently before it, or they were combined; we cannot assume that SM (the Southern Maitrāyaṇī) had one author who wrote up the entire text as an original composition" (73).

This looks straightforward, but only at first sight. After a little reflection it becomes absurd. Homer has told the stories of many heroes, each of them given to a great deal of speech-making. Does this imply that we should postulate the prior existence of independent Achilles and Hector Instructions? And should we assume that there were originally separate texts dealing with Alyosha, Father Zossima, Albertine, and Baron de Charlus that Dostoyevsky and Proust have put together?

The famous German phenomenologist of religion, Rudolf Otto, has attempted to give more credence to his phenomenology by erecting it on the solid foundation of the science of philology. With such scholarly aids he has attempted to show that the Bhagavad Gītā was derived from an original *Ur-Gītā*, to which materials from eight different lost treatises were subsequently added. But even philologists cannot all be deceived. Emile Senart noted in the introduction to his translation of the Gītā: "Efforts have been made to distinguish pieces of different origin; attempts that are ephemeral as well as arbitrary." I have elsewhere drawn attention to the absurdities that have resulted from the uncritical application of these allegedly scientific methods to the text of the *Yogasūtra* (Staal 1975, 86–91). The moral is simple. Philology has to be used, but with caution.

Chapter 5. ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AGNICAYANA

IN THIS CHAPTER I shall be concerned with what are regarded as indisputable facts on the one hand, and with speculative and sometimes controversial theories on the other. "And perhaps by looking at the two side by side, and rubbing them against each other, we may cause justice to blaze out as from the two kindling sticks" (*ἐκ πυρρίων*: Plato, *Republic* *A* 435 a 1–6).

AGNI

In order to understand the Agnicayana it is first of all necessary to gain some insight into Agni.¹ About 200 of the 1,028 hymns of the R̥gveda are addressed to Agni, who in this respect comes second only to Indra. Agni's name is clearly Indo-European: compare Latin *ignis*, Russian *ogon'*, Lithuanian *ugnis*, etc. Though considered a god, he is never disconnected from his element, fire, until later Hindu mythology, where he appears in more anthropomorphic terms. In the R̥gveda, Agni is brilliant, golden, has flaming hair and beard, three or seven tongues, his face is light, his eyes shine, he has sharp teeth, he makes a cracking noise, and leaves a black trail behind. He is fond of clarified butter (*ghṛta*, or *ājya* when used as an oblation), but he also eats wood and devours the forest. In fact, he eats everything (*viśva-ad*). He is in particular a destroyer of demons and a slayer of enemies.

Though old, Agni is also ageless and permanently young. Himself fertile, he is the son and manifestation of victorious strength (*sahas*; Gonda 1957). He gives long life. He is born from the kindling blocks (*araṇī*), from heaven (where he is lightning and the sun), and from earth, where he resides in plants and woods. He is also born from water, celestial as well as terrestrial. This at first surprising origin is connected with clouds and with the firewood that comes from plants and trees, themselves born from water. It reflects the image of the sun rising out of the eastern ocean and setting in the western ocean; and it also indicates that Agni, as generative power, is the male principle, which enters the female waters as it enters the earth.

Agni is intimately connected with the home, the clan, the tribe, and with rituals. He is installed in the home as the domestic fire; he guards and lights the home; he is a guest, a friend, chief of the clan or tribe (e.g., of the Aṅgirasas or the Bharatas). But he is also the domestic priest, the hotā or adhvaryu priest, and the sacrificer of the gods. He has a triple seat (the three altars).

¹ For this section I have made use of Geldner (1957) 3–34; Gonda (1959) 79–96, (1960) 67–73; Hillebrandt (1927) I. 71–193; Keith (1925) 154–162; Renou and Filliozat (1947) I. 325–326.

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He is clever, in fact, wise and omniscient: he is a seer, inspired and inspiring. He takes the offerings to the gods, but he also brings the gods down to earth to partake of them. He is the messenger between gods and men. He is common to all men (*vaiśvānara*). This appellation is traditionally taken to refer to the sun, to the sacrificial fire, and—in later times—to the “fire of digestion” (but see below, pages I:161–162). There are also suggestions that Agni as Jātavedas is identified with the domestic fire, and as Naraśaṃsa or Tanūnapāt, with the southern fire (Findly, unpublished). Agni also has close relations with several other deities. His ritual function becomes increasingly important in the Yajurveda and in the Brāhmanas.

Here is a typical hymn addressed to Agni (R̥gveda 5.11):

1. Guardian of the people, the vigilant, the clever; Agni was born for new prosperity. Face touched with butter, he shines bright with great sky-touching flame for all the Bharatas.
2. On the triple altar men have kindled Agni, banner of the sacrifice, first domestic priest. Let him ride the chariot with Indra and the gods; let him be seated on the sacred grass for the sacrifice as a skilful hotā.
3. Impure, you are born of your parents; bright, you came up as the joy-bringing seer of Vivasvant. With butter they made you strong, Agni, to whom the offering is made.
4. Agni . . . may he come at once to the sacrifice; Agni, whom men carry in every house; Agni became the messenger, the bringer of offerings; Agni they are choosing, choosing one with a seer's power.
5. For you, Agni, these sweetest words; for you may this prayer be a blessing to the heart. You are the one these songs fill with power, as the great rivers fill the Indus, you are the one they make strong.
6. The Aṅgirasas found you in a secret place, Agni, resting in every wood. So are you born, when stirred up with great force; you are the one they call “Son of Strength,” O Aṅgiras.

It is not possible to understand Agni's role in the R̥gveda except in relation to other gods, powers, and ideas. Let me merely mention that Agni is close to Indra, though Indra is a warrior god and hero, whereas Agni always stays close to fire. In other respects, Agni complements Soma who is a god, a plant, and the juice extracted from that plant, and is therefore simi-

जनस्य गोपा अजनिष्ठ जागृवि-
रभिः सुदक्षः सुविताय नव्यसे ।
घृतप्रतीको बृहता दिविस्पृशा
धूमद् वि भाति भरतेभ्यः शुचिः ॥
यज्ञस्य केतुं प्रथमं पुरोहित-
मग्निं नरस्त्रिभुवस्थे समीधिरे ।
इन्द्रेण देवैः स्रष्टुं स बर्हिषि
सीदन्ति होता यजथाय सुक्रतुः ॥
असंमृष्टो जायसे मात्रोः शुचि-
मेन्द्रः कविरुदतिष्ठो विवस्वतः ।
घृतेन त्वावर्धयन्नम आहुत
धूमस्ते केतुरभवद् दिवि श्रितः ॥
अग्निर्नो यज्ञमुप वेतु साधुया-
ऽग्निं नरो वि भरन्ते गृहेगृहे ।
अग्निर्दत्तो अभवद्भ्यवाहनो-
ऽग्निं वृणाना वृणते कविक्रतुम् ॥
तुभ्येदमग्ने मधुमत्तमं वच-
स्तुभ्यं मनीषा इयमस्तु शं हृदे ।
त्वां गिरः सिन्धुमिवावनीर्मही-
रा वृणन्ति शवसा वर्धयन्ति च ॥
त्वामग्ने अङ्गिरसो गुहां हित-
मन्वविन्दन्ति श्रियाणं वर्तवने ।
स जायसे मध्यमानः सहो महत्
न्वामाहुः सहसस्पुत्रमङ्गिरः ॥

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larly devoid of anthropomorphic traits. Agni and Soma, though both gods, do not merely reside in heaven or in the sky, from where they have to be brought or called down to earth. They also are already here, concrete, visible, amenable to touch and taste, and present in the hands of men. According to Renou, following Bergaigne, the entire Vedic mythology was reshaped, or at any rate reorientated, as a setting for Agni and Soma, and all the other divinities became counterparts or reflections of them (Renou 1953, 14). Agni and Soma, the sacred fire and the sacred drink, are in any case the main deities of the Vedic ritual. While all the deities of the Vedic pantheon are addressed and invoked in the course of ritual performances, and heaven is mentioned as the fruit of rituals, the ritual itself creates a sacred world within the sacrificial enclosure by means of priestly activities that take place here and now. Here lies the most probable explanation for the fact, stressed by Renou (1953, 16), that the most important episodes of Vedic mythology, which reflect cosmogonic events, are not reflected or used in the ritual. All features of Vedic religion find expression in ritual, but generally through the mediation of Agni and Soma.

In later Hinduism, Agni's character changes. Though a few temples have been dedicated to his worship, Agni becomes a minor deity and a mythical figure. His change in position is already indicated in the *Kena Upaniṣad*, where the gods, puzzled by Brahman (“What sort of specter can this be?”), send Agni to find out. On Agni's arrival, Brahman asked him: “Who are you?” Agni replied: “I am Agni.” “If that is what you are, what is your power?” “I can burn everything on earth.” Then Brahman put a blade of grass before him: “Burn that.” Agni came at it with all his force, but he could not burn it.

In the epic and the Purāṇas, “Agni is an unscrupulous seducer of women and an adulterer, qualities that cause him to be identified with Śiva” (O'Flaherty 1973, 91, in the chapter entitled *Agni, the Erotic Fire*). In later mythology, it is Śiva who gives the gods a blade of grass that they are unable to burn up. Apart from sexual fire, Agni is also the fire of *tapas*, “ascetic heat,” another link with Śiva. In a legend that is found in many versions, Agni falls in love with the wives of the seven sages. The story offers also an explanation of Agni's association with the ritual call *svāhā* (above, page 47). As told in the *Mahābhārata* and summarized by O'Flaherty, the legend deserves to be quoted:

Once when Agni saw the beautiful wives of the great sages sleeping in their hermitage, he was overcome by desire for them. But he reflected, “It is not proper for me to be full of lust for the chaste wives of the Brahmins, who are not in love with me.” Then he entered the household fire so that he could touch them, as it were, with his flames, but after a long time his desire became still greater, and he went into the forest, resolved to abandon his corporeal form.

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Then Svāhā, the daughter of Dakṣa, fell in love with him and watched him for a long time, seeking some weak point, but in vain. When she knew that he had gone into the forest full of desire, the amorous goddess decided to take the forms of the wives of the Seven Sages and to seduce Agni; thus both of them would obtain their desire. Assuming the form of each of the wives in turn, she made love with Agni, but she could not take the form of Arundhatī, the wife of Vasiṣṭha, because Arundhatī had such great powers of chastity. Taking Agni's seed in her hand each time, she reflected, "Anyone who chances to see me in this form in the forest will falsely accuse the sages' wives of committing adultery with Agni," and so to avoid this she took the form of the Gāruḍī bird and left the forest. She threw the seed into a golden lake on the peak of the white mountain guarded by Rudra's hosts. The seed generated a son, Skanda, and some time later the six sages' wives came to Skanda and told him that their husbands, thinking that Skanda had been born of them, had abandoned them. They begged Skanda to let them dwell for ever in heaven, and by his grace they became the constellation of the Kṛttikās, considered the mothers of Skanda. Then Svāhā married Agni (O'Flaherty 1973, 94-5).

Agni's intermediary position is retained in another legend, which sheds light on the psychology of libations. Though Pārvatī is Śiva's spouse, she is unable to bear the fiery energy of Śiva's seed. Agni cooperates by drinking the seed, sprinkling the Ganges with it (or with his own seed), after which Pārvatī drinks it, receives the seed thus suitably diluted, and gives birth to Skanda (O'Flaherty 1973, 103-107; Plate 9; see also O'Flaherty 1975, 104).

The sexual symbolism of fire is also connected with the analogy between the action of the two kindling woods and the sexual act, an association which is found all over the world. Ṛgveda 3.29.1-3 compares *manthana*, "kindling of fire by friction," to procreation: Agni is hidden in the kindling blocks (*araṇī*) as the seed (*garbha*) is well kept inside pregnant women (*garbhin*). "Put it down into the supinely stretched, you attentive (priest). When impregnated she gave birth to the male (Agni)."

In Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 6.4.21—a section sometimes left without translation, which incorporates verses from Ṛgveda 10.184 and Atharvaveda 5.25—the association is reversed:

He spreads her thighs. Let heaven and earth be spread! Uniting with her, placing his mouth upon hers, stroking her three times in the direction in which the hair grows, he says:

Let Viṣṇu prepare the womb,
Let Tvaṣṭṛ shape the forms,
Let Prajāpati discharge,

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Let Dhātṛ place the seed in you.
Place the seed, Sinivālī,
Place the seed, goddess with flowing hair!
Let the Aśvin twins place the seed in you,
The two lotus-garlanded gods.
Golden are the kindling woods
Which the Aśvins use to make fire.
We invoke that seed for you
To bring forth in the tenth month.
As earth is pregnant with Agni,
As heaven is expecting Indra,
As wind is the seed of the skies,
I place the seed in you.

In later Hinduism, Agni remains closely connected with the burning of forests. In the Māhābhārata, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna have a picnic on the banks of the Yamunā river. Their girl friends dance, sing, quarrel, and drink wine. "The epic will present us with few if any moments more suitable for a scene of ease and pleasure" (Hiltebeitel 1976, 209). But now there appears "a strange looking brahmin of gold complexion, yellowish brown beard, radiant and splendid. . . . It is Agni in disguise. Thus begins one of the oddest and most grisly segments of the epic, the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest." In this story, Agni, for reasons that need not detain us, has come to consume the forest with all its creatures. He proceeds to do so. The noise is deafening, the water from Indra's clouds cannot reach the ground because of the heat, and only six people survive. Hiltebeitel ends his study of the mythological significance of this conflagration with the remark "that the story itself can begin to make sense as a story, whether or not it also makes sense as history" (ibid., 224). In what follows I shall be primarily concerned with the opposite: Agni, Soma, Indra, Viṣṇu, and many elements of the Vedic ritual have mythological and spiritual significance, but they also make sense as history and prehistory.

FIRE

IN ORDER TO gain a better understanding of Agni we have to go far beyond the Ṛgveda, in fact, back to the earliest history of man.¹ This early history accounts for many features of Agni and of fire rituals such as Agni-hotra, Agniṣṭoma, and Agnicayana.

Though the use of fire has been attributed to a subhuman man-ape (*Australopithecus prometheus*), prevailing scholarly opinion ascribes it only

¹ For this section I have made use of Eiseley (1954); Fewkes (1920); Forbes (1958); Frazer (1958); Gilbert (1947); Harrison (1954); Heizer (1963); Hough (1926, 1928); Lippert (1931); MacLeod (1925); Oakley (1955, 1956, 1958, 1961); Peake (1933); Sauer (1961); and Wilbert (1967).

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to men. With the exception of some insects, birds, and the Philippine tarsier (a nocturnal animal that picks up hot embers from campfire sites), most animals have a strong dislike of fire. Man took a long time to overcome his fear of fire, but he eventually tamed and then domesticated it. Four stages can be distinguished in this evolution: (1) a fireless age, evinced by an early man or hominid, *Zinjanthropus*, of the Olduvan culture in East Africa, some 1,750,000 years ago; (2) an age during which fire was used, i.e., collected, as exemplified by the hearths of Peking man, at least 250,000 years ago; (3) an age during which fire was produced and kindled, as exemplified by the Neanderthal about 50,000 years ago, and by *Homo sapiens* during the last 20,000 to 15,000 years; (4) an age during which fire was domesticated, roughly overlapping with the Neolithic age, beginning in different regions at different times within the last 10,000 years.

Several conclusions can be drawn from these time scales. For most of his history, man kept out of the way of fire and watched it from a distance. Finally he started to collect it carefully from fires that resulted from natural conflagrations. Sauer believes that the volcanically active lake country in the mountainous interior of East Africa may have provided man with his first fire, though fire could have been obtained from lightning as well as from spontaneous combustion, e.g., through contact between air and certain kinds of coal (such coals were located not far from the Choukoutien area where Peking man was found). Throughout the hundreds of thousands of years during which fire was collected but could not yet be made, man was continuously concerned with its safe and proper preservation, for it was not known how long it would take before fresh fire could be obtained again. It is not farfetched to suppose that man's sense of continuity was inspired by his experience with fire.

Fire was carried over long distances, enabling man to move into the colder regions of northern Europe and Asia, and therefore much ingenuity must have been expended on the development of reliable methods for its preservation and transportation. And now we observe a remarkable fact. When man at last discovered how to make fire himself, he continued to take extreme precautions to preserve and transport it, and kindled fresh fire only rarely. This tendency can only partly be explained by the fact that it might save fuel and labor, be necessary in a wet climate, keep the carrier somewhat warm, or be useful during hunts when fire must be at hand. The universality of the practice of keeping fire suggests that it is largely a custom that survived from the earlier fire-collecting age. Since ritual activities are activities that are performed even though they are not, or are no longer, necessary or even functional, the custom of preserving and carrying fire became one of the earliest ritual activities that we know of. It led man to think of himself as inseparable from his fire, and vulnerable without it. It is not surprising that fire and life were connected at an early stage, and that the preservation of fire came to be regarded as the preservation of life. Thus arose the idea that a

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long-lasting fire gives a long life. Its counterpart is the custom of extinguishing the fires when somebody has died. The fear of losing fire and the custom of preserving it prevail to the present day among a variety of people all over the world. Though most contemporary nomads and seminomads, for example, can produce fire in less than a minute, they take fire with them on most of their trips or hunts that cover long stretches of time.

Hearths developed during the period in which fire was collected. Originally they were shallow depressions lined with stones or clay. Burnt-clay fireplaces have been found in many different regions. Many are circular, possibly because of the placement of fuel around the fire. Hearths were also made from stone or sand. A later invention was to raise the fuel above the fire-bed, to promote combustion by increasing draught. This could be effected by piling the fuel on a few large stones, a method that eventually developed into stone altars and into the earliest stoves. Even among contemporary tribes there are some who do not use such methods. Among the Warao of former British Guiana, for example, the hearth is simply "a big lump of clay, about one meter in diameter and about 30 cm. thick, which is packed by women onto the manaca beams of the kitchen house" (Wilbert 1967, 9).

The earliest fuel was most probably wood, and the combustible qualities of different kinds of wood were learned early. Other early kinds of fuel are charcoal, dung, bones, and fat. The constant search for fuel, a very time-consuming activity, led to deforestation in many areas (and continues to do so), and has been related to various features of social organization, including slavery. Settlements and villages had to move when the supply of firewood was used up. The New England Indians assumed that the English appeared on their shores because the firewood supply in their own land had been exhausted. Ritual elements entered into the gathering of fuel. Among the northern Paiute, girls undergoing puberty rites had to collect five piles of firewood each day. The Vestal Virgins of Classical Antiquity were given similar tasks.

The transportation of fire over short distances could be effected with the help of a smoldering or flaming brand, or a few hot embers, carried on a flat or hollow stone. For long journeys use had to be made of the smoldering properties of substances when deprived of a free supply of air: e.g., decaying wood, bark, and fungus. Fire was transported (and is still transported by the Tierra del Fuegians) on clay spread on the floor of canoes. With the development of ceramics, clay pots became the preferred containers for the safe transportation of fire over long distances. A vivid description occurs in Xenophon's account of one of the expeditions of Agesilaos, king of Sparta (401-360 B.C.):

It was then that Agesilaos won credit by a trifling but timely expedient. For since no one among those who carried provisions for the regiment had brought fire, and it was cold, not only because

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they were at a high altitude, but also because there had been rain and hail towards evening—and besides, they had gone up in light clothing suitable to the summer season—and they were shivering and, in the darkness, had no heart for their dinner, Agesilaos sent up not less than ten men carrying fire in earthen pots (*χύτραι*). And when these men had climbed up by one way and another, and many large fires had been made, since there was a great deal of fuel at hand, all the soldiers rubbed oil on themselves and many of them only then began their dinner (*Hellenica* IV.v.4; translation by C. L. Brownson, with one modification).

When fire is transported over long periods, it has to be installed on a temporary hearth for the night, or whenever a stop is made. Special precautions have to be taken that it will not go out. This is referred to, for example, by Homer who describes the falling of night after Odysseus had been washed on the shores of the island of Ogygia:

Like a man who hides a brand in the black embers on a distant isolated farm, saving the seed of fire so that he will not have to seek elsewhere, so did Odysseus cover himself with leaves (*Odyssey* V. 488–91).

All over the world, when the fire goes out in a village house, it is borrowed from a neighbor, often by carrying a few embers on a potsherd. Later this responsibility was taken on by the state. Charlemagne ordered a fire to be kept burning in each inhabited house. Up to the eighteenth century in Europe, bells were rung when the evening fell. This was called *cur-few* ("cover-fire," French: *couvre-feu*, Italian: *copri-fuoco*). Originally the term *cur-few* referred to a brass implement, like a candle extinguisher but larger, with a handle and perforations, which was put over the coals and embers in the fireplace to keep them alive throughout the night.

The tending of fire required careful planning, and it has been suggested that it developed man's sense of the future and of time in general—a suggestion that seems to underrate man's sensitivity to the passage of day and night and of the seasons. Whereas collecting firewood, and later kindling fire, were by and large male occupations, tending the fire was mostly done by women. Most archaeologists and anthropologists agree that the first homes developed around hearths, and that family life was greatly influenced by the tending of fire. Even at present, when large groups of people live together in communal huts or houses, each family keeps its own fire. The earlier sociologists described this domestic association in colorful terms, as, e.g., Lippert in 1887:

Tending the fire is a woman's affair. It formed the center of the

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sphere of life which woman dominated. It made the woman's domestic establishment more stable and to some extent more onerous than it had formerly been, but it likewise made it much more permanently attractive to the men than when her intermittent sexual charm had been the sole allurements. Those who had previously sought the company of women only for limited periods were now bound permanently to her hearth, and soon no longer as mere guests but by ties of reciprocal duties and obligations. About the hearth there arose the home in every sense of the word (Lippert 1931, 131).

Several of the important uses of fire are touched upon in Xenophon's account: warmth, cooking, and light are among the most basic. Much older is the use of fire that made cave dwelling possible by keeping dangerous animals out. At a very early period, spear points were hardened in fire. After the Stone Age, the blacksmith became one of the earliest specialists. Fire drives were used to stampede game, and the resulting conflagrations expanded grasslands (e.g., in America). Fires led to new vegetation and a new fauna. Manmade fires for stampeding game may have contributed to the extinction of large animals such as the mammoth. In much later periods, such new pastures were used for grazing herds, and the ashes for fertilizer. Forest clearing by fire is an important step toward agriculture. In all these respects fire is like man: a ruthless force that disturbs and transforms the ecology.

Cooking may have originated relatively late, possibly not long before Neanderthal man. Eiseley has an eloquent, though specifically American, eulogy on meat:

Meat, more precious than the gold for which men later struggled, supplied the energy that carried man across the world. Had it not been for fire, however, all that enormous source of life would have been denied to him: he would have gone on drinking the blood from small kills, chewing wearily at uncooked bone ends or masticating the crackling bodies of grasshoppers (Eiseley 1954, 55).

Another early use of fire was in connection with the dead: the counterpart, as we saw, of its connection with life. Fires were lit over the bodies of the dead Neanderthal. Excavations in the ancient Pueblo cemeteries still show masses of charcoal and ashes appearing as a layer in the earth above the skeletons. Cremation was common in the Bronze and Iron ages, and remained widespread throughout the world. The exceptions appear very much later, especially in Judaism and Christianity, and culminated in a decree of Charlemagne of 785, which made cremation a capital offense.

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The invention of means for making fire remains shrouded in mystery. It may have taken place more than once. Among our contemporaries, only the Andaman islanders are presumably ignorant of the art. Even if this is true, it is more likely that they forgot it than that they had never known it in the past. The two oldest methods for fire making are percussion and friction; it is not known which one came first. Percussion or strike-a-light methods are mainly achieved with the help of pyrites and flint. The oldest use of pyrites has been documented for the Neolithic and Bronze ages, and is referred to in the old Testament. This method continues to be used in various parts of the world, especially in northern Asia. A unique method, confined to southeast Asia, is the production of sparks by striking bamboo with a piece of porcelain. The percussion methods of producing fire have led to at least one imaginative etymology:

The Eskimo, who still in Greenland use the flint-and-pyrites method of kindling, call fire *ignek*. Among the Western Eskimo, who live in and near Alaska, the word is *knik*, *knok*, *knákhk*, *k'núk*, *kanuk* or *ik'nuk*. This represents very clearly the sound of flint striking a lump of pyrites. . . . These words for fire among the Eskimo remind us of the series of Aryan words . . . *agni*, *ogni*, *ugnis* and *ignis*. Is it possible that these, too, indicate the sound of the flint and pyrites nodule (Peake 1933, 54-5; quoted approvingly by Oakley 1955, 44).

Even if this improbable etymology is to be taken seriously, the difficulty remains that the Indians did not use the percussion method.

The other ancient method for making fire is through friction of wood. There are several types, including the fire-saw, fire-drill, pump-drill, and fire-plow. The fire-drill is probably the most universal, Polynesia being the only region from which it is absent. In Europe, it probably dates from Neolithic times; in Asia, it is older and not yet obsolete. As in all methods that use friction, there are two pieces of wood, the lower of which rests on the ground, and is called the "hearth." In the fire-drill, a cylindrical or tapered drill held vertically is rotated between the two hands, which, at the same time, press the stick downwards into a shallow pit in the hearth. The fire is caught in a small heap of tinder, consisting, e.g., of fungus or dead leaves. The process takes generally less than a minute. The vertical and horizontal parts are often called active and passive, or male and female, respectively, as we have already seen in the previous section.

A special kind of fire-drill is the thong-drill, in which the vertical cylinder is rotated by a cord passed round in a loop. The thong is pulled in such a way that the rotation changes its orientation repeatedly. The pole is pressed down with the help of another piece of wood, bone, stone or a coconut shell. At present, this method is found among the Eskimos, in northern

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Asia, India, and Indonesia. It has led to another colorful, if improbable, etymology:

It has been suggested that the Greek word for fire, *πῦρ*, represents the sound of the whirring of the fire-drill (and similarly for English *fire*, German *Feuer*, French *feu*, etc.: Peake 1933, 54).

Whatever the merits of this etymology, it is a fact that English "pure" is related to Greek *πῦρ*.

The making of fire is often accompanied by rites and songs. In an Irish saga:

Fionn took from his tunic the two sacred fire-sticks that he carried, and turned them one upon another while Usheen sang the fire-chant:

Golden Bird
Hawk of the Sun
Shake loose a feather,
A feather of flame.

Fire leaped between the sticks, and soon the hearth was blazing. (Young 1929, 133).

It is likely that both methods, percussion and friction, were accidentally discovered when men worked with tools. Sawing and drilling are themselves not attested before the Upper Palaeolithic. Lucretius explained that kindling by friction originated when people observed the branches of a tree lashed against each other by the wind until they caught fire. Though this hypothesis was adopted by several historians, it refers to a rather uncommon event, and the hypothesis that the fire drill was discovered when drills were being used, and *mutatis mutandis* for the other techniques, is more plausible. Whatever their origin, these practices readily explain the belief that fire resides in wood, just as the actual collection of fire from lightning confirms the belief that fire comes from heaven. Underlying these notions is the general idea that fire is not made, but is rather extracted or released. Lucretius still expresses what must have puzzled man for thousands of years: "If in logs flame lurks hidden, and smoke and ash, it must need be that the logs are composed of things alien in kind, of alien things that rise up out of the logs" (*De Rerum Natura* I.871-872). The Warao Indians similarly deny that fire is made. It existed from time immemorial, and elaborate mythologies explain that some trees contain fire and others do not (Wilbert 1967, 21).

In the domain of religious speculation, the most basic ritual distinction is between two kinds of fire, "perpetual fire" and "new fire." These two kinds

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represent the two main periods in the history of fire, the early age of fire collecting and the later age of fire production. As we have seen, the carrying around of fire became a ritual activity as soon as it was no longer necessary, viz., as soon as methods for kindling fire had been discovered. The permanent installation of fire on hearths and altars, in homes and temples, took on similarly ritualistic overtones at the same time and for the same reason. This ritualization also explains why the "perpetual fire" is generally considered more pure than the "new fire," which is nothing but an upstart in the evolution of man. Thus "pure" fire has often to be obtained from a sacred place where it has been kept since time immemorial.

The distinction between different kinds of fire is no longer sensed by modern man. We feel that fire is fire, and if we prefer a hearth fire to central heating, we attribute our preference to such things as the bright motion of flames or the smell of burnt wood. During most of the existence of our species, however, when the day was over and it began to be cold and dark, we were eager to welcome our own fire as a dear friend upon whom we could count. To ancient man, fires had the same individualities we reserve for some people and animals. We do not easily understand ritual fires made on different occasions and obtained from different places, kept separate or mixed carefully. We ourselves do not feel that if we expect our friend, anybody else would do just as well. The ancients and several contemporary tribes treat fires with the same kinds of consideration.

Fire, especially perpetual fire, was jealously guarded and surrounded with extreme concerns for its purity. In the Roman temples of Vesta, fire had to be tended by virgins (if it went out, the Vestal maidens were flogged by the Pontifex Maximus). The Jews prohibited "foreign fire," and Siberian tribes on the Amur river were reported unwilling to part with any of the fire in their huts. When new fire was made, the event was surrounded with awe. Generally, all existing fires had to be put out first. Ritual fire making was sometimes done by means of the strike-and-light method (the altar fires referred to in the Old Testament were installed in this way). The most common method for ritual fire making, however, is the method of kindling by friction. Sir J. G. Frazer has reported it for all of Europe, and W. H. Gilbert for the Americas.

Most myths about fire attribute its origin to heaven, which would seem to support the view that fire was originally obtained from lightning. Many ancient myths relate that fire was brought from heaven by a bird. This bird was often considered a thief, and the legend of a human fire thief is also widespread. Its prototype in Western culture is the myth of Prometheus, who stole fire from heaven and gave it to mankind. Zeus punished him by chaining him to the Caucasus mountains, where an eagle picked out his constantly growing liver. Prometheus is regarded as the inventor of human civilization, the emblem of rebellion against tyranny, and in the final resort the symbol of mankind itself. In Aeschylus' "Prometheus Bound" (436-471, 467-506) Prometheus boasts of his inventions:

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I found men witless and gave them the use of their wits and made them masters of their minds. . . . They did not know of building houses with bricks to face the sun; they did not know how to work in wood. They lived like swarming ants in holes in the ground, in the sunless caves of the earth. . . . It was I who first yoked beasts for them in the yokes and made of those beasts the slaves of trace chain and pack saddle that they might be man's substitute in the hardest tasks; and I harnessed to the carriage, so that they loved the rein, horses, the crowning pride of the rich man's luxury. It was I and none other who discovered ships, the sail-driven wagons that the sea buffets. . . . Beneath the earth, man's hidden blessing, copper, iron, silver, and gold—will anyone claim to have discovered these before I did? No one, I am very sure, who wants to speak truly and to the purpose. One brief word will tell the whole story: all arts that mortals have come from Prometheus (translation David Grene 1959, 327-329).

The Greek name *προμηθεύς* is generally interpreted as "prudent, with foresight," related to the verb *προμηθεύομαι*, "foresee." Mayrhofer's Etymological Dictionary relates it to Sanskrit *pra-math* from *math*, "steal, rob, take away." In R̥gveda 3.38.5, *vastra-mathi* is used in connection with a thief who steals clothes (*vastram*), and in 8.66.8 *urā-mathi* is applied to a wolf who takes away sheep (*urā*). The last term occurs once more, in Vādhula Śrauta Sūtra 28a, where it is applied to the seasons who take away ritual.

Since ancient times the verb *math* has been confounded with *manth*, "stir, churn," to which it may not be etymologically related. This term is used in the Hindu myth of the churning of the world ocean. The churning activities of gods and demons resulted in the salty water yielding milk, butter, wine, poison, and finally Soma, elixir of immortality (see, e.g., Gonda 1954, 128-129; O'Flaherty 1975, 273-280; etc.). The noun *manthana* is used not only to refer to churning, but is also the general term for kindling fire by friction. In a commentary on the *Kātyayāna Śaruta Sūtra*, its derivative *pramanthana* is defined as "the piece of wood that comes forth from the upper kindling block (*uttarāraṇi*), with which the fire is churned." In his book on the descent of fire and the divine beverage (*Die Herabkunft des Feuers und des Göttertranks*: 1859, 15-18), Adalbert Kuhn has connected pramanthana with the name Prometheus, thus regarding Prometheus not only as representing the theft of fire from heaven (which corresponds to the age of collection), but also the kindling of fire by friction (the age of production). Unfortunately, this etymology is hard to maintain. The proper connection is with *mathnāti*, "steals," as Johanna Narten (1960) has shown.

While fire marks the origin of civilization, and ritual fire the beginnings of religion, ritual fire is also connected with athletics. After the battle of Plataea (479 B.C.), when the Greeks defeated the Persians, Apollo ordered the consecration of a fire altar for Zeus, the Deliverer. As Plutarch tells us

in his *Life of Aristides* (ch. xx), all existing fires had been polluted by the Persian barbarians and had therefore to be extinguished. A fresh and pure fire had to be obtained from the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi, at a distance of more than 60 miles. A young athlete, Euchidas, volunteered to go. He left at dawn, ran, naked, to the altar of Apollo at Delphi, where he "purified himself by sprinkling himself with holy water and crowned himself with laurel." He took the sacred fire on a torch, ran back and arrived at Plataea before sunset. There he handed the sacred fire to his countrymen, collapsed from exhaustion, and died (cf. Séchan 1951, 2-3).

While the torch race (*λαμπαδηδρομία*), often run in relays, became a prominent feature of the Greek games, it also acquired symbolic significance. Plato (*Laws* 776 b) says that parents procreate and feed children, "handing over life like a torch" (*καθάπερ λαμπάδα τὸν βίον παραδιδόντας*). In ancient India, similar practice must be assumed to account for similar metaphors. At the core of Buddhism is the doctrine that there is rebirth and transmigration without anything transmigrating. In the second century B.C., the Greek king Menander (Pāli: Milinda) carried on the Greek dominion in Bactria founded by Alexander the Great. Puzzled by the Buddhist doctrine, he posed the question to the sage-monk Nāgasena, and asked him to give some illustrations. Nāgasena began his answer by saying that rebirth takes place without anything transmigrating in exactly the same way in which a flame is lit from another flame without any fire being transmitted (Milindapañha 71.16).

As we shall see in the section on Soma (page 111), the Vedic Indians believed that fire was brought from heaven by a bird of prey (*śyena*), who also brought Soma, the elixir of immortality, down to earth. Connections between fire, a bird, and immortality are found all over the world, but they take very different forms. The Egyptian sun bird *beni* and the phoenix of western classical antiquity, subsequently adopted in Christianity, represent a distinct type, in which death and rebirth are at the core of the myth. Both birds are connected with life after death. In classical sources, emphasis was laid on the spontaneous generation of the bird. In Christianity, the phoenix became a symbol of resurrection. The connection with fire is not known from Egypt, but developed in the west. According to this tradition, the phoenix bird, knowing that the time of its death is approaching, burns together with its nest, ignited by the heat of the sun. From its ashes a new phoenix arises (Van den Broek 1972, chapter vi).

The Chinese *feng* 鳳 or *feng huang* 鳳凰 has been called a phoenix, but has almost nothing in common with its western counterpart. It does not cremate itself, and no new bird arises out of the ashes of the old. In very early times, *feng* was a wind bird, and its name is related to the Chinese word for "wind," *feng* 風. Later it became a bird of good omen, subsequently identified with the symbolic "red bird" of the south. Finally, it turned into the fantastic bird of art and decoration (Edward Schafer, personal communi-

cation; cf. Sowerby 1940, 21, 101).

None of these birds seems closely connected with the Sanskrit *śyena*, Avestan *saēna*, or other Indo-European relatives. It is possible, however, that there are historical connections with the shamanistic cult of the eagle, which is quite common in central and northern Asia. Among several Siberian peoples, the eagle is regarded as the master of fire, who gave fire to man. The eagle is also the founder of civilization (*er ist vorherrschend Kulturbringer*: Findeisen 1956, 79). The eagle is a totemistic bird, from which several tribes derive their origin (e.g., the Yakuts). It is regarded as the first shaman by the Buriats and the Yenisei Ostyaks. Only a person who is a descendant of an eagle may perform certain fire rituals. Similar ideas are found in the Americas, e.g., in Peru (Sternberg 1930, 192, 132-133, 142-143; Findeisen 1956, 74-80; Anisimov 1963, 191).

As totem, the eagle is inviolable. To kill an eagle is a capital sin (Sternberg 1930, 132). This is reminiscent of the vow (*vrata*) that has to be observed by any performer of the Agnicayana, Taittiriya Saṃhitā 5.7.6.1 states: "If the piler of the fire (*agnicit*) were to eat of a bird, he would be eating fire and go to ruin. He should observe this vow for a year, for no vow goes beyond a year." Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 10.1.4.13 is more lenient:

They say: "He who has built the fire altar must not eat of any bird, for he who builds the altar of fire assumes a bird's form. He might become ill. Therefore the *agnicit* should not eat of any bird." Nevertheless, one who knows this may safely eat. For he who builds an altar assumes Agni's form, and all food here belongs to Agni. One who knows this will know that all food belongs to him.

Some mention should be made of early imitations of birds, which have a technical as well as a religious aspect. I am not referring to aeroplanes, but to the art of kite flying. It has often been stated that the kite was invented by the Greek philosopher Archytas of Tarentum, but this is an old error (see Chadwick 1931, 487, note 4). Kites were probably invented in China. Though there may be earlier references there, the first unambiguous mention of kite flying is of the second century B.C. In China, kites were used for signalling and to test the behavior of winds (Needham 1959 III, 477; IV, 2, 576-579). At an early period, kite flying became a sport. Often tabooed to women, it continues to be practised not only by children but also by adults, e.g., in Central Asia: "The shopkeepers of Yarkand are said to be fond of flying kites as they sit outside their shops" (Chadwick 1931, 483, after E. Breck). Kite flying is common in China, Korea, Japan, Southeast Asia, Melanesia, and Polynesia. In Polynesia, the religious functions of the kite are combined with its uses in meteorology and navigation. The kite represents the soul of the kite flier. Kites were sent to heaven as a religious rite, to the accompaniment of kite songs. In New Zealand, members of the

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important Tawhaki family are described as ascending heaven on kites. Rehua, god of the highest heaven, is referred to as a sacred bird and ancestor of the kite. Throughout the Pacific, birds are regarded as means of communication between gods and men. Kite flying is a form of religion that enables man to gain access to heaven (Chadwick 1931).

In India, kite flying is still practised by people of all ages. The season begins in the latter half of November and continues up to the middle of January. Many kinds of kites are mentioned by Mujumdar (1950, 71-77).

Against such a varied, worldwide background, it is not surprising that the Agnicayana altar was constructed in the shape of a bird of prey (*śyena*). Yet, as we shall see (page 124), the altar represents a cosmic man, and might therefore be expected to be built in the shape of a man. There are traces of this in descriptions of the altar that mix features of a bird with those of a man (cf. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 10.4.5.2; Van Buitenen 1962, 30; Dumont 1951).

The dictionaries give a variety of translations for Sanskrit *śyena* and the related Avestan *saēna*. Mayrhofer, for example, lists: "bird of prey, eagle, falcon, hawk." In most of this book I have retained the translation "eagle" or "bird of prey." It seems likely that the Vedic Indians had a more specific bird in mind. The one scholar who has given serious attention to the identification of *śyena* is Schneider (1971, 31-37). Basing himself upon the R̥gveda, especially 4.26-27 (see below pages 111-113), he feels that the bird was characterized in the first place by speed, because it came toward the Soma in a rapid descent. It also knew fear (4.26.5; cf. 1.32.14), and it probably drank the blood of its prey, since it nibbled at the Soma stalk and drank some of its juice. In the R̥gveda, moreover, it is never called strong or large, and so could not have been either of these ("Sicher kann man daraus den Schluss ex silentio ziehen": page 33). Schneider has concluded from these observations that *śyena* could not have been a "miraculous bird" (Wundervogel) or eagle, but was probably a falcon. He ends his analysis with a reference to falconry, which was very probably known in India at a very early period. The expressions *iṣitaḥ* "discharged" (R̥gveda 9.77.2 and 10.11.4) and *asarji* "shot forth" (4.26.5) are reminiscent of a falcon let loose.

I think these observations are excellent, yet the conclusion need not follow, and other evidence points in another direction. Why not make the assumption that the shape of the bird-shaped altar of the Agnicayana preserves some features of the shape of the original bird? It at least provides a picture, which is more than can be said of any text. Looked upon as a schematized representation of a real bird, the diagram of the altar (Figure 7, page 66) has three characteristics: the tail is small, the wings are large, and the wings are as broad at the tip as they are at the base.

Now let us take a look at birds of prey, or *Falconiformes* (if we exclude owls). These include buzzards, eagles, falcons, harriers, hawks, and vultures (Lloyd 1971, 4). Confining attention to wings and tails, we find that eagles and falcons have long tails and either narrow wings or tapered, narrow-tip-

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ped wings. Long, narrow-tipped wings enable them to fly very quickly in pursuit of prey; long tails enable them to turn quickly. The only birds characterized as a group by short tails and long, broad, untapered wings are vultures. They cannot turn quickly, but "soar easily and then glide for great distances with very little flapping" (Lloyd, 23). The reason is that they may fly more than two hundred miles a day in search of dead animals, and they need not pursue fast-moving prey. They are equipped for long-distance flights, not for short-distance pursuits.

In R̥gveda 4.26-27, the Soma had to be captured quickly, but, being a plant, it did not have to be followed in rapid pursuit. A vulture is eminently equipped for such a task. It has the properties that Schneider has enumerated, which are in fact common among *Falconiformes*: speed, and the capacity for fear and for drinking the blood of its prey. Finally, some are large and some are small. But unlike Schneider, I don't think the *argumentum ex silentio* proves anything. Moreover, the Iranian *saēna* was definitely large (Martin Schwartz, personal communication).

To narrow down the possibilities, we have to take geography into account. The Department of Ornithology at Berkeley has provided me with a list of fifty-five species of *Falconiformes*, now living in or near northwest India or Central Asia. According to Mercedes S. Foster and Steve Bailey, members of the staff of the Berkeley Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, it is impossible to make an accurate determination of the species involved from the diagram of the Agnicayana altar of Figure 7. There are six species, however, that they consider the most likely candidates:

<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>	Indian White-backed Vulture
<i>Gyps indicus</i>	Indian Griffon
<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>	Himalayan Griffon
<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	Griffon Vulture
<i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>	Indian Black Vulture
<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	European Black Vulture.

Though we are dealing only with probabilities, it is possible to reduce this list further. The *śyena* brought fire and Soma down from heaven, and should therefore be expected to move long distances and live at high altitudes. These requirements are met by griffons, which are "large vultures that live in colonies in mountainous country." Among the four griffons on the above list, the *fulvus* occurs from Spain to northern India, while *bengalensis* and *indicus* live mostly in India, Burma, and Malaysia. The visually outstanding species is the *himalayensis*. It is native to Asia and is the second-largest bird of prey in the Old World. Like other large vultures, its life span may extend to sixty years. These birds outdo human nomads by far in the distances over which they migrate. Many birds of prey migrate yearly from northern Asia to India and Southeast Asia. They cross the Himalayas in autumn and return in spring (Lloyd 1971, 8, 18, 87-88).

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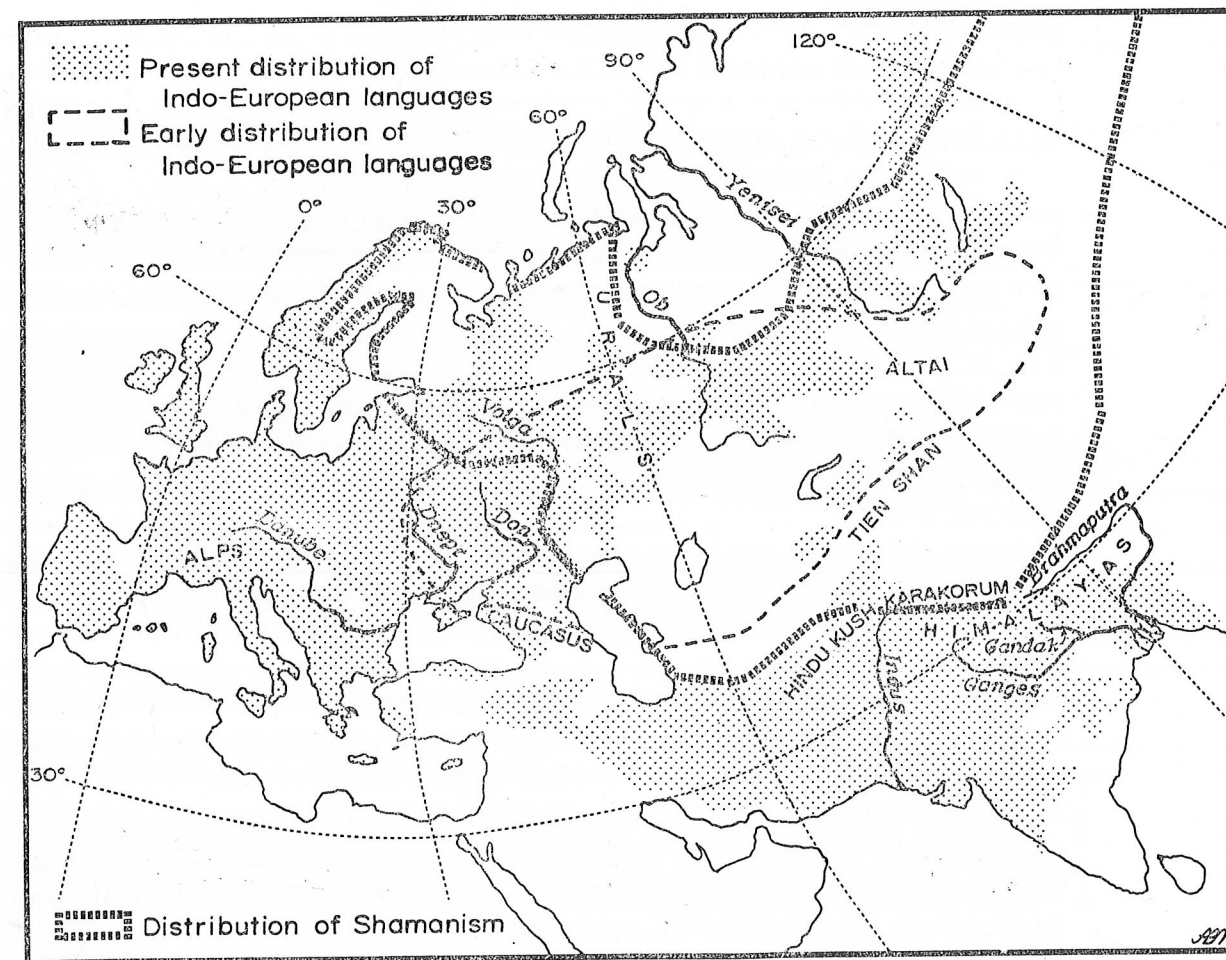
The Himalayan Griffon is "a huge brownish-white bird with a wing span of about nine feet" (Lloyd 1971, 22, 87). To see such a bird fly across Himalayan skies must be an awe-inspiring sight. It is likely that the Harappans saw it, and possible that their sign , with its broad wings and short tail, refers to it (cf. Parpola, c.s., 1970, 29). It is even more likely that the Vedic nomads saw it, when they crossed the western Himalayas. Until better evidence is forthcoming, I would be inclined to believe that the Vedic śyena was originally *Gyps himalayensis*.

VEDIC NOMADS

THE DISCOVERY THAT many of the languages of India (including Vedic and Sanskrit) are related to most of the languages of Europe (including Greek, Latin and its Romance derivatives, Germanic, and Slavic) has led to the establishment of a family of languages, the Indo-European family. The languages of this group have become more widely diffused than those of any other linguistic family. Before 2,000 B.C., Indo-European languages were spoken by seminomadic people who wandered the steppes that stretch from Poland to Central Asia. These nomads had tamed the horse, which they harnessed to light chariots with spoked wheels. Around the end of the third millenium, they began to move west, south, and east, and entered parts of Asia and Europe closer to the river deltas and oceans. Some of these areas, in particular in the Middle East, were inhabited by sedentary people who had evolved a much more advanced level of civilization. The Indo-European languages were established and came to flourish in Europe, Iran, and India. An Indo-European language, Tocharian, was preserved in Chinese Turkestan until the eighth century A.D., when it was finally replaced by Turkic languages. (See map A.)

I shall use the term "Vedic nomads" to refer to people who spoke an Indo-European language, who came from Inner Asia, and who entered the Indian subcontinent around 1,500 B.C. We have no unambiguous material evidence that such an invasion actually occurred, and there may have been more than one wave. But the Vedic language of the *R̥gveda*, which was composed around 1,200 B.C. in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent (possibly as far west as what is now Afghanistan), is clearly Indo-European, and this fact by itself constitutes sufficient proof for the view that such a migration took place. Though Vedic is related to the other languages of the Indo-European family, it is sepecially close to Avestan, which was spoken in Eastern Iran during the period between 1,000 and 500 B.C., and to Old Persian, the language of the cuneiform inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings (ca. 500-330 B.C.). Apart from these linguistic facts, we know little about the anthropology and identity of the people who spoke Vedic. We don't know exactly where they came from, nor whether they came in loosely related

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Map A

groups during a relatively short period, or separately and repeatedly during different periods. Correlations between linguistic and archaeological data are only beginning to be traced (see Parpola and Thapar in the beginning sections of Part III).

The culture of the *R̥gveda* shares features with other Indo-European cultures, but it also possesses features in common only with the Iranians, and other features not found elsewhere in the Indo-European family. It has been customary to refer to these last features as "Indian," and there is no harm in doing so, provided this does not evoke the wrong associations (as it often does). The vision of tall, blond, blue-eyed Aryans, importing their culture into a backward area inhabited by dark and snub-nosed natives, comforting as it has been to some Western scholars, has been largely reversed. We now know, especially after the excavation of Harappā, Mohenjo-daro, and numerous other sites, that long before 1,500 B.C. a highly evolved city culture flourished in the northwestern part of the subcontinent, as it did in

the Middle East. Although the larger cities and towns of this Indus civilization may have disappeared before the advent of the Vedic nomads—probably as a result of natural calamities—it is therefore more accurate to say that the Indo-Europeans, though they imported their language, met with remnants of a civilization in many respects superior to their own.

That the semibarbaric nomads imported their language is not surprising, but the impact of this importation is nothing if not astounding. While Vedic was spoken only in the northwest for a few centuries, Sanskrit was adopted all over the subcontinent. Codified by the grammarian Pāṇini around 500 B.C., it established itself as the language of civilization for the next 2,500 years. The languages that subsequently arose in northern India (Middle-Indic Prakrits as well as modern Hindi, Panjabi, Gujarati, Marathi, Bengali, Oriya, etc.) are all Indo-European. It is not easy to explain this extraordinary development. No doubt, the nomadic invaders were good fighters. The strength of the Indus civilization was already broken, and “the peaceful and conservative cities of the Indus Valley could neither withstand nor absorb the invaders” (Basham 1954, 29). It is equally relevant to take into account that the Vedic nomads, in spite of the relatively low level of their material culture, possessed very advanced poetic techniques and had an extraordinary devotion to language and the power of language, which they called *brāhmaṇa*. Their superiority was accepted at least in part because it was believed that they were influential with the gods, which in turn was attributed to the power of their Vedic mantras. This belief in language is found among other people who speak an Indo-European language. In fact, all the higher civilizations of mankind are characterized by an exaggerated faith in the power of language. In Vedic culture, there seems to have been no limit to this faith. It is possible that the cult of language comes from Central Asia. The magical power of songs is still very pronounced in Shamanism (see, e.g., Eliade 1964, 201). Whatever its origin, subsequent developments strengthened the belief in the supernatural qualities of Vedic and Sanskrit and in their superiority over other languages. This conviction is retained in Hinduism, which is pervaded by the belief in the efficacy of mantras, often allegedly Vedic. It also played a role in the spread of Hinduism throughout the Indian subcontinent. This has been noted not only by scholars, who are already professionally obsessed by language, but also by British civil servants. Logan, Collector of Malabar, for example, speculated in his *Malabar Manual* of 1887 about the advent of the Nambudiri brahmins in the following terms:

They posed before the rude chieftains with whom they came in contact as “God-compellers.” Their sonorous mantras and spells could compel the gods to take the wandering ghosts of even the worst of men directly to heaven (quoted in Padmanabha Menon 1924, I, 51–52).

The close connections between the Vedic Indians and their contemporaries in Iran provides justification for setting up an Indo-Iranian subgroup within Indo-European. The existence of this group is primarily demonstrated by close linguistic similarities (in phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and style) between Vedic, Sanskrit, Avestan, Old Persian, and several later languages, without there being counterparts in other Indo-European languages. The existence of Indo-Iranian also rests on shared features of religion and civilization. In the area of vocabulary, we have, for example, Avestan *airya*, *haoma*, and *zaota* corresponding to Vedic *ārya*, *soma*, and *hotā*, respectively. Going beyond the correspondence of words, we find the Iranians refer to themselves as *airya*, “of noble birth” (from which “Iran” is derived), in the same manner in which the Vedic Indians refer to themselves as *ārya* (whence “Aryan”). The *haoma* belief and cult in the Avesta are in most respects similar to the corresponding Vedic concepts and ritual. The *zaota* is the chief priest at the *haoma* ritual. Though the *hotā*, in the classical *śrauta* ritual, is almost entirely concerned with recitation, and not with the performance of ritual acts, which is the province of the *adhvaryu*, this may have been different originally. The term *hotā* is derived from a verb *hu-*, “to make an oblation,” not from *hū-*, “to invoke” (Renou 1947, 8–9; 1958, 59–60; cf. Minard 1949, 123, n. 346a). The same is true of *zaota*. It is possible that, at an early stage of development of the fire ritual, the *hotā* made the oblation into the fire that Agni transmitted to the gods. At a later stage of development, Agni became the messenger who brought the gods down to earth. The *hotā* therefore acted as invoker (Schneider 1971, 73).

The Iranian fire ritual is in many respects similar to the Vedic. Fires are installed on three altars. The domestic altar is circular, the offering altar, square. On the Iranian side there seems to be better evidence than in the Vedas for Dumézil’s view that the three fires are connected with the three main subdivisions of society: farmers being represented by the domestic fire, priests by the offering fire, and soldiers by the third, which wards off evil influences. We are not surprised at this statement, for Dumézil often overshoots the mark (for a recent critique, see Gonda 1974). In Iran, fires were also transported. For example, in front of the army of the last Darius, in 331 B.C., embers were carried from a *Vərəthragna* fire (Boyce 1975, 459; *Vərəthragna* corresponds to Vedic *vṛtrahan*, “slayer of the demon *Vṛtra*,” i.e., Indra).

Some of these structures are not only Indo-Iranian, but Indo-European. The Romans had a circular domestic altar for Vesta (*aedes rotunda*), and also *templa quadrata*. In Latin, *focus* or *foculus* (unlike *āra*) refers to an optionally movable fireplace. In Umbrian, the word for “movable fireplace” is *ahiti* (Nagy 1974, 89–92).

In Iran, many features of the fire cult survived in later times, which is largely due to the fact that Zarathustra (around 600 B.C.?) retained and developed them. This contrasts to some extent with the Indian development,

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for remnants of the Vedic fire cult are confined to the homes of Brahmin *āhitāgnis* in relative isolation from the development of Hinduism. Even outside the brahminical tradition, however, oblations into the fire (*homa*) have remained common in India. In Iran there has been a tendency to identify each pre-Islamic temple as a fire temple. In point of fact, fire temples do not seem to be earlier than the fourth century B.C., and may have been built as a reaction against the temple worship of other deities represented by icons (Boyce 1975). Only much later, in the Sassanid period (226–650 A.D.), did fire temples become the main religious centers. They were square, with a dome-shaped roof, and made of stone. There were also movable altars. The king took his personal fire with him on such an altar when he went on a campaign (Widengren 1965, 273).

Throughout the development of the fire cult in Iran, fire was referred to as *atur*. The *āgnīdhra*, kindling priest of the Vedic ritual, has for his Iranian counterpart the *ātravaxš* priest. The term *agni* may be present in Old Iranian in the personal name Ag-nu-par-nu (found in a letter addressed to Assurbanipal between 650 and 640 B.C.), and once again in Avestan *dāštayni*, of uncertain meaning, and therefore uncertain as a testimony (Wikander 1946, 35, 102–103).

The Iranian and Vedic fire rituals reflect the nomadic character of the Indo-Iranians. In contrast with the temples of later Hinduism and of the earlier Indus civilization (Wheeler 1968, 52–53; cf. Parpola, c.s., 1969, 5), there are no temples in the Vedic ritual. Vedic rites are performed inside temporary structures, constructed and consecrated at the beginning of the ritual, and burnt at its completion. Ritual implements are made of perishable materials such as wood and clay. These implements are also afterwards burnt, or else submerged in water. Caland observed that “the ritual was often metaphorically assimilated to a march, a voyage, an expedition, and involved in fact a large number of procession-like movements” (Caland and Henry 1906, 450; quoted by Wasson 1972, 14, who compares it to a “trip”). The name of the chief priest of the ritual, the *adhvaryu*, is also reminiscent of this nomadic background: it is related to *adhvan*, “way, road, course.” The related word *adhvara*, “ritual,” may originally have meant “ceremonial trip” (Mayrhofer: *feierlicher Gang*). These survivals of the nomadic way in India parallel the way of Taoism in China, which similarly incorporates remnants of the nomadic culture of Inner Asia (cf. Staal 1975, 204).

Like the nomadic invaders of Europe and the Near East, the Vedic nomads imported their horses and chariots as well as tools and weapons that were superior to those used in the sedentary civilizations they encountered. Whether they carried fire across the mountains of the Hindukush and the Western Himalayas is an open question to which archaeology has yet to provide an answer. Basham (1954, 27) has observed that:

At Chanhū Daro, on the lower Indus, the Harappā people were

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replaced by squatters, living in small huts with fireplaces, an innovation which suggests that they came from a colder climate.

While the indebtedness of the Vedic nomads to the culture of their Indo-European ancestors is well-known, their links with cultural trends in Central Asia remain relatively unexplored. In the area of language there is evidence of contact between Indo-European and Finno-Ugrian, but its interpretation is controversial. In later times, Finno-Ugrian has borrowed a considerable number of words from Indo-Iranian (Burrow 1973, 24). As a glance at Map A shows, the present distribution of Shamanism (after Findeisen 1957) covers much of the same area where once Indo-European languages were spoken. It is not surprising to find links between Shamanism and the culture of the Vedic nomads. In the area of religion, several features of Vedic ritual have been characterized as shamanistic. Eliade (1964, 403ff.) has pointed out similarities in what he has called “ascensional rites.” To reach heaven and the gods, the *yajamāna* climbs a ladder set against the *yūpa*, or sacrificial pole cut from a tree. When he reaches the top of the ladder, he spreads his arms as a bird spreads its wings. The Siberian shamans also climb trees and dispatch sacrifices by putting a tree or pole through the spoke hole of their huts. They are also compared to birds, in particular eagles. In either case, the pole represents the *axis mundi*. Though Eliade regards these rites as characteristic of Vedic ritual in general, they occur only in the *Vājapeya* ritual (and can be seen on van Buitenen’s film of its 1955 performance), which does not, however, diminish the significance of the parallelism. The ecstatic flight occurs, furthermore, in *Rgveda* 10.136 (see Staal 1975, 197–198, 204–208), which has other shamanistic overtones.

Apart from the importance of the bird of prey for shamanistic and Vedic culture, the shamans also performed a horse sacrifice that may be related to the *Aśvamedha* or Vedic horse sacrifice (Eliade 1964, 199). Finally, there is an analogy in the function of some shamans and of one of the Vedic priests. The Ugrian shaman takes part in sacrifices only indirectly: “He confines himself to praying and guiding the victims’ souls to the respective divinities. . . . Even when he takes part in sacrifices, the shaman plays more of a ‘spiritual’ role” (Eliade 183). This is reminiscent, as Eliade has observed, of the role of the Brahman priest in Vedic rituals (see above, page 46).

The similarities between Shamanism and Buddhism are more striking. I shall revert to them in the next section. The word shaman itself has been derived from a Prakrit derivative of Sanskrit *śramaṇa*, a term that denotes (non-Vedic) ascetics and monks, in particular Buddhist monks. This etymology remains controversial. There are also similarities between Shamanism and Yoga (see, e.g., Ruben 1940; cf. also Nölle 1953). It seems likely that many of these similarities can be explained in historical terms. However, for the time being, details of historical connections are lacking because most of the data on Shamanism are relatively recent.

PART I THE AGNICAYANA RITUAL

Let us return to the Vedic nomads and their adventures in South Asia. On Indian soil, the invaders continued their course in an eastern direction. During the later Vedic period, the predominant migration is from west to east: "From the west people go to the east, conquering lands" (*Kāthaka Samhitā* 26.2, quoted in Rau 1957, 13). This eastward move remained confined to the plains north of the Ganges, which was crossed only much later. To the present day, only the left bank of the Ganges is considered pure and holy. Every visitor to Varanasi (Banaras) will recall that across from the city, on the opposite shore of the river, there is an uninhabited wasteland. Not every tourist knows that, in the early morning, the orthodox cross the river in small boats to empty their bowels on this inauspicious side. Thus a gigantic public toilet commemorates the non-Aryanized lands of the past.

That the southward movement started only much later is consistent with the general inauspiciousness of the south, referred to in many Vedic sources. The south is the region of death and of the ancestors. The head of a corpse should generally point to the south (Caland 1896, 16, 39). Nirṛti, Goddess of Disaster, is propitiated to the south of the Old Hall (below, page 343). The *havis* offering may not be moved to the south (Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa 2.1.3.4, quoted in Mylius 1972, 370). This orientation remains a characteristic of Hinduism and survives to the present day. Śiva as the divine preceptor (*dakṣiṇāmūrti*) faces south because the traditional teachings come from the north (Staal 1975, 145). In some nonbrahmin temples in south India, vegetarian deities and rites, which come from the north, are on the northern side, while nonvegetarian deities and rites are on the southern side (Dumont 1953, 264).

Moving to the east and then to the south is also moving with the sun. This is widely believed to lead to victory and all things auspicious. It is reflected in the clockwise circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇa*) of a sacred area or object, which is kept to the right (*dakṣiṇa*) side of the wanderer. The term *pradakṣiṇa* occurs for the first time in the sūtra literature, and remains the predominant auspicious movement of Indian religion, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina (in contradistinction to the Tibetan Bön religion, where the auspicious circumambulation is counterclockwise). This clockwise movement has spread all over Asia and is also found elsewhere (see, e.g., Seidenberg forthcoming).

Ideally, man faces east. Hence Sanskrit *dakṣiṇa*, "south," means also "right"; *uttara*, "north," means also "left"; and *pratyāñc*, "west," means also "behind." Ruben (1939, 288) has drawn attention to parallels from Central Asia. According to Thomsen (1924, 134), among the Turkic peoples, the principal direction is the east. Hence east is called "in front"; west, "behind"; south, "right"; and north, "left." This testimony from Turkic inscriptions in stone, found in Mongolia, is relatively late (8th century A.D.), and it is possible that it is a borrowing from the Indo-Iranians, like other vo-

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cabulary borrowings (see e.g., Burrow 1973, 24). Whether its origin is Turkic or Indo-Iranian, the Vedic nomads must have found that this orientation was in accordance with the direction of their migrations in the Indian subcontinent.

The eastward marches of the Vedic nomads were accompanied by battles, cattle raids, and the burning of forests. According to Kosambi, it would not have been possible to clear the land near the Ganges by burning: the riparian jungle was still too thick for agrarian settlement. "The main Aryan settlements therefore extended eastwards in a chain, a thin line along the Himalayan foothills to southern Nepal." The original expansion was limited to the foothills west of the Gandak river (Kosambi 1972, 90).

In the northern plain of the Ganges, the rivers flow roughly from north to south. This interrupted the burning of the forests by Agni. These events are referred to in a famous passage of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (1.4.1.14-17), in which the Sadānīrā is probably the same as the modern river Gandak:

14. Videgha Māthava was at that time on the river Sarasvatī. From there, he (Agni) went burning along this land, towards the east. Gotama Rāhūgaṇa and Videgha Māthava followed him as he burned. He scorched all these rivers. The Sadānīrā, which flows from the northern mountain, that one he never burned. Of old, Brahmins never crossed it, thinking, "It was not burned by Agni Vaiśvānara."
15. But now, there are many Brahmins to the east of it. Then the (land) was wild, and swampy, untasted by Agni Vaiśvānara.
16. Now, it is cultivated, for Brahmins made Agni taste it through the rituals. But even in late summer, the river nearly rages, so cold it is, never burned by Agni Vaiśvānara.
17. Videgha Māthava then said (to Agni), "Where am I to live?" "Your home is to the east," he answered. Even now this river is the boundary of the Kosalas and the Videghas, for these are the descendents of Māthava.

Weber, who was the first to draw attention to this passage (1850, 170-172), has also argued that Śāṇḍilya, author of the Agnirahasya, "Secret of the Fire Altar" (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa book, x), belonged to the northwest. One reason he adduced is that books vi-x refer only as to the peoples of the northwest. Mylius (1972, 373) has confirmed this by drawing attention to Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 9.1.2.26, which describes the climate as "freezing cold" (*praśīta*), a condition more easily applicable to the Panjab than to what is now called Uttar Pradesh. According to Weber, preoccupation with a fire cult is also more intelligible in the northwest, because of the relative proximity of the Iranians. In support of this view he referred to a term for

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measurement, *vitasti*, which is found in the Avesta and in book X of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (Weber 1873, 266–267). This view may need qualification because of the subsequent excavations. The northwest was also the stronghold of the Indus civilization, and it is very likely that there was an indigenous fire cult there. Books VI to X of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa are later than the other books (as shown by Minard 1936, 96, 104, extending earlier investigations by Brunnhofer). It would seem likely that this interpretation of the Agnicayana, composed in the northwest, was a response to an indigenous fire cult, with which it was partly integrated. We shall find detailed evidence in support of such a view (below pages 154–162). There is a further characteristic of the northwesterners to which Weber has drawn attention. When the nomadic tribes went further east, the caste system began to become more ramified. Later, the northwesterners were looked down upon precisely because they lacked the niceties of a sophisticated caste system (Weber 1850, 220).

One should not visualize these movements exclusively in terms of a large-scale invasion. There were frequent raids, which are reflected in the rituals, as Heesterman has shown. The rites of the “yoking offerings” (*prayujām havīṃsi*), for example, refer to the Kuru-Pāñcāla people, known for their ritualistic zeal. They marched east during the cold season, seized the barley crop, fed their men and animals, and returned before the rains (cf. Rau 1957, 15; Heesterman 1957, 211; 1962, 15). It may be noted here that there is no reason to assume that the climate was very different from what it is nowadays (cf. Raikes and Dyson 1962 for the western region; Mylius 1972, 373–374 for the upper and middle Ganges plain).

Similar expeditions are reflected in the *Yātsattras*, Soma rituals that require the participants to move each day a *śamyā* throw (the *śamyā* is a wooden peg, used to fasten a yoke). Thus the invaders moved along the rivers Sarasvatī and Dṛśadvatī, each time performing a ritual (Heesterman 1962, 34–35). They moved in a northeastern direction (Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa 2.297) and therefore upstream (*Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* 25.10.12), since the Sarasvatī flows to the southwest. The havirdhāna and sadas sheds were moved on wheels. Since the term havirdhāna refers primarily to the Soma cart, and secondarily to the shed in which two Soma carts are installed (later more explicitly called: havirdhāna-maṇḍapa), this suggests that during these expeditions, Soma was generally transported on a cart. The Soma cart of the ritual is not a chariot with spoked wheels, but has solid wheels. Though the Vedic nomads knew spoked wheels, they adopted the best means of transport of the Indus civilization and of contemporary Sumer: a cart with solid wheels (Basham 1954, 29).

All nomads engage in raids, especially cattle raids. There is evidence for neolithic cattle raids in South India, and the stealing of cattle remained one of the great themes of the earliest Tamil literature (Allchin 1963, 172). That

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the Vedic nomads engaged in such raids is not surprising. What is interesting is that these raids, like the eastward movement of Agni, were reflected and preserved in the Vedic ritual.

A passage of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa (2.299) shows that the nomads were not always victorious: during a Yātsattra, the leader was killed by huntresses (*vyādhini*) of the Trikartas or the Salvas (tribes which lived in the region around what is now Lucknow). When members of the expedition lost heart, one of the priests admonished them: “Those who were killed went to heaven (for it was a sacrifice), and those who survived are now the most praiseworthy, for they had all been a wretched lot to begin with.” As in later times and other lands, religion was at hand where worldly objectives failed.

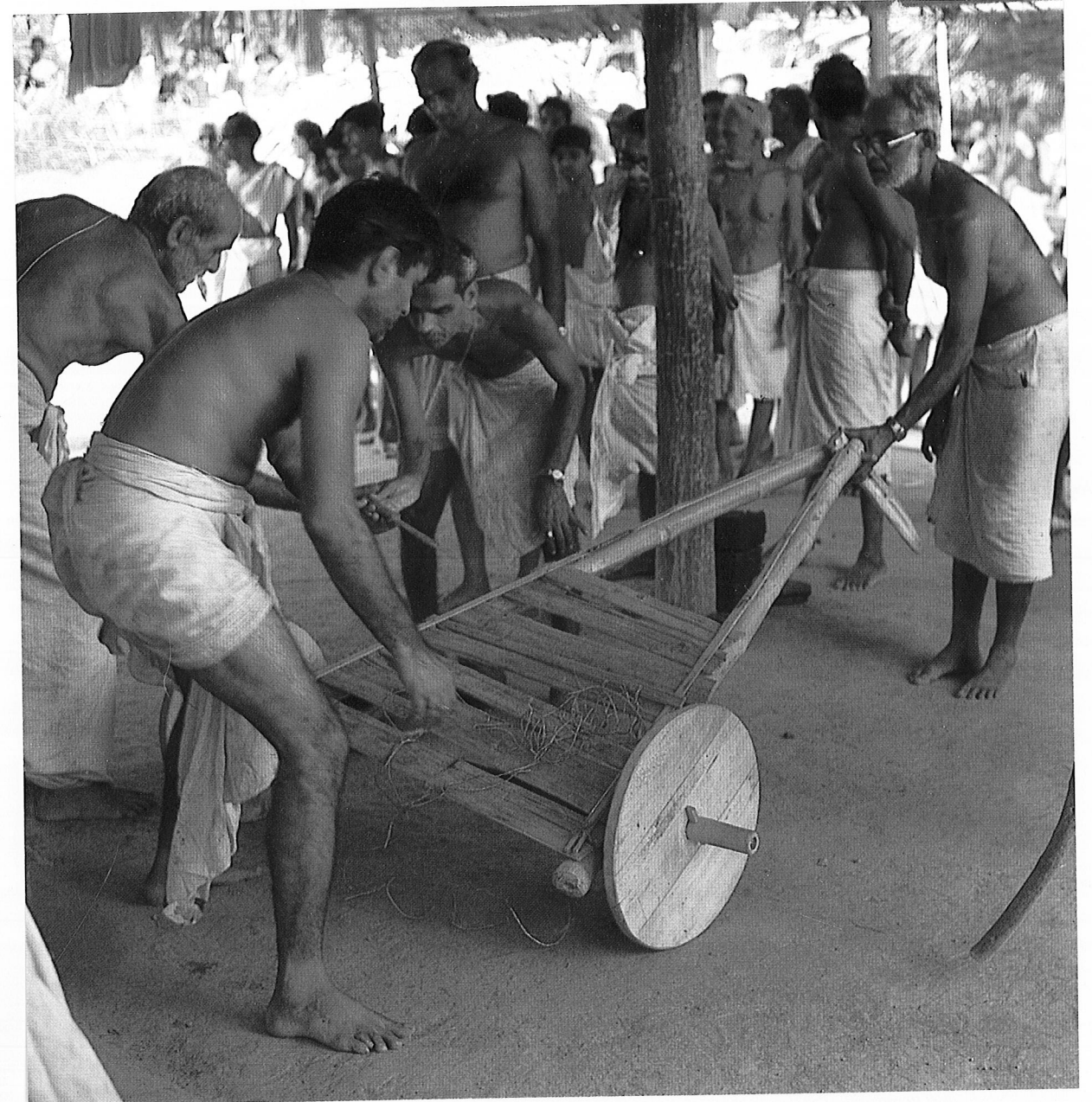
The burning of forests creates pastures and paves the way for agriculture. The Vedas swarm with cattle and often mention agriculture (*kṛṣi*; for details, see Rau 1957, 25–26). The ritual also abounds in references to cattle: they constitute the best *dakṣiṇā*, and the bricks of the fire altar are expected to turn into cows. Agriculture is reflected in numerous rites, e.g., those which involve a plough (*sira*). The field for Agni is ploughed before the altar is constructed. The ploughing rites are rich in symbolism that relates to agriculture, fertility, and sexuality (see e.g., Dange 1970, 73–74; 1971, ch.V, dealing with Ṛgveda 10.101). Just as fire can be installed after ploughing is over, there are many festivals where a bonfire is made after ploughing (for south India, see Allchin 1963, 133–135). Since the burning of forests leads to new pastures and agriculture, fire festivals are generally connected with cattle and fertility (for Europe and Iran, see Allchin 1963, 136–142; for Greece, Nilsson 1923).

Throughout the ritual we find expressions of the desire for space and the concern with lebensraum. In the Soma rituals, when Agni and Soma are carried forth in an easterly direction to the new offering altar, the adhvaryu recites: “This Agni must create space for me, he must go in front destroying the enemies; hotly roused he should conquer the enemies, at the booty winning he should conquer booty” (Taittirīya Saṃhitā 1.3.4.1 c, quoted by Heesterman 1962, 35). During this fire transportation (*agnipraṇayana*) other deities are also invoked. When the adhvaryu arrives at the offering fire, he offers a spoonful of clarified butter and recites: “Viṣṇu, make a wide step. Make wide space for us to live” (Taittirīya Saṃhitā 1.3.4.1 d). The same mantra is recited during the animal sacrifice when an offering is made for the sacrificial pole. The animal sacrifice itself is characterized in the following terms: “Those who perform the animal sacrifice, conquer all the worlds” (*Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra* 7.1.1.). The terms for “wide” (*uru*) and “world” (*loka*) are often combined, from the Ṛgveda onward. The expression *urum lokam kṛ-* means: “to make wide space, room” (Gonda 1966, 23).

The term *loka* is Indo-European, the reconstructed original **louko* referring to a “more or less open space to which the light of day has access”

PLATE 3
The Soma Cart

Soma is transported on a cart after it has been purchased and before it is installed on a throne and worshipped as King Soma. Though the Vedic nomads knew chariots with spoked wheels, the Soma cart has solid wheels.



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(Gonda 1966, 9). In Latin, such a clearing was called *lucus*, which later came to mean "grove." The Romans and Umbrians placed fire in such a grove (Nagy 1974, 91). These terms are related to Latin *lux*, English "light," etc. According to Gonda, an intermediary in meaning may be Vedic *roka*, which means "light, lustre, brightness," and is also an attribute of Agni. May we go a step further and assume that it is Agni who was responsible for these clearings in the forest? Gonda does refer, in an accompanying footnote, to the making of clearings in the forest by burning, but this should presumably be read in conjunction with the solemn warning he had sounded a few pages earlier:

At this point the question arises as to how far the importance of the Vedic *loka*-concept can be seen as a universalization of concrete social, economic, political and psychological situations in which either peaceful pastoral and cattle-breeding populations were threatened by inroads of nomadic tribes and deprived of their dwelling places, or nomads did not in endless jungles, forests and mountains succeed in finding sufficient Lebensraum for their increasing numbers. Although it may be readily conceded that the incessant struggle for means of subsistence, and especially for a sufficiency of fields and pastures can hardly fail to leave its imprint on the view of life of a community, one should guard against any exaggeration.

So far much of what I have said is summed up in the words of the Ṛgveda (1.93.6): "Agni and Soma! Strengthened by brahman, you have made ample space for the ritual." Geldner comments on this passage by saying that it reflects the spread of the Aryan cult (*das heisst sie haben den arischen Kult ausgebreitet*). Similar words are addressed to Indra and Viṣṇu (Ṛgveda 7.99.4). Gonda interprets these passages in a wider sense, stressing the general implication that the ritual should be successful (Gonda 1966, 21). This is no doubt the sense they acquired in the context of the ritual, which could not possibly have survived if it had only been a celebration of battles and raids. What we witness here, however, is a significant transition that is characteristic of ritual in general. We met with this transition in this book for the first time when we observed that the transportation of fire became ritual when it was no longer functional, because the art of making fire had been discovered. Similarly, there certainly was a time when the Vedic nomads went on expeditions that were accompanied by battles, cattle raids, forest burning, songs and recitations, ritual transportation of fire, and ritual celebrations of Soma. But when the nomads began to settle in the subcontinent and established lasting relationships with the indigenous inhabitants, the expeditions receded to the background and the accompanying activities lost their accompanying function. When the Soma also became increasingly rare (see

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next section), the ritual character of all these activities became predominant, and the success of the ritual itself became the primary concern of the participants. Thus ritual was the sole survivor and all other activities were ritualized.

Rituals tend to absorb everything that has gone before and has lost its original function. Earlier gods are also incorporated. The term *uru*, "wide," is found in frequent association with the all-pervading activities of Viṣṇu (Gonda 1954, 68–71). Viṣṇu has also been connected with a surveyor, and his three steps can be read into a Harappan inscription (Parpola 1976, 147–148). In the Ṛgveda, Viṣṇu is described as taking three steps, which may indicate that he was originally an independent third, and the connecting link between gods and demons and between heaven and earth (Kuiper 1962). Though he lost this function, the three steps survived in the ritual, where the *yajamāna* takes three steps at the end of his consecration. During the Vedic marriage ceremonies, the number is increased: bride and bridegroom take seven steps toward the northeast. The Buddha also took seven steps (immediately after he was born), and so do the shamans of Inner Asia (Eliade 1964, 405–406).

Soma is called *urugavyūti*, "with wide pasture" (Ṛgveda 9.90.4). But the god who is most closely connected with battle is Indra, the leading divinity of the Ṛgveda. With Viṣṇu, Indra shares the characteristic of "making room" (Gonda 1966, 21). Like Agni, he is aggressive and victorious. In the Soma ritual, before Agni and Soma are jointly carried forth (*agnīṣomaprāṇayana*), Agni is carried forth by himself (*agniprāṇayana*), as in the animal sacrifice. During this procession the *adhvaryu* recites mantras for Agni, Indra, and other deities, asking strength and wealth for the *yajamāna* and expressing the hope that his enemies will be slain (Taittirīya Saṃhitā 4.6.3). If the Soma ritual includes an Agnicayana, another recitation is added during the carrying forth of Agni: the "second *hotā*" (one of the other priests: see Caland's note to Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra 17.14.7) recites a long hymn to Indra, the *Apratiratha* or "Song to the irresistible warrior" (Taittirīya Saṃhitā 4.6.4). The verses of this Taittirīya recitation correspond to a large extent to a late hymn of the Ṛgveda (10.103), attributed to "Indra's son Apratiratha," which is, in Geldner's words, "a vigorous battle song addressed to soldiers leaving on a campaign" (*ein urwüchsiges . . . Schlachtlid, das den ausziehenden Soldaten nachgesungen wird*). The remainder of Taittirīya Saṃhitā 4.6.4 is made up of verse from another Ṛgvedic hymn (6.75) that glorifies battle. In the *Apratiratha* recitation, the background of the *agniprāṇayana* ceremony becomes explicit. Indra is invoked as a victorious warrior or hero, "fond of slaughter, disturber of people," who—with the help of his arrows, chariots, and troops—destroys the enemies. When the second *hotā* recites: "Comrades, follow in Indra's footsteps!" he sounds less like an officiating priest than like a gang leader or commander-in-chief. This hymn of battle refers in passing to *dakṣiṇā*, sacrifice, and Soma,

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which were clearly associated with the expedition, side by side with cattle raids, the killing of enemies, and the provision of lebensraum ("Yours will be space wider than wide!").

If it is true that there was an earlier stage of development, during which battles and victories were real, and a later stage, by which time they had become ritual, it should be possible to determine—if not in absolute terms, at least with reference to our texts—when the first stage was completed and the second began. It would seem probable, for example, that the earlier Saṃhitā literature reflected real battles, which, by the time of the ritual sūtras, had become fully ritualized. However, this is not the case. What we find instead is an inextricable mixture. In the Saṃhitā we meet with phrases that in spite of their military bearing, are already ritualized. In the śrauta sūtras there are, side by side with ritual descriptions, passages that can only make sense in a warlike context.

An example of the former is the mantra of Taittirīya Saṃhitā 1.3.1.1 c: "He who hates us and whom we hate, here I cut off his neck." This is commented upon in several brāhmaṇas (Taittirīya Saṃhitā 6.1.8.4; cf. 6.2.10.2; 6.3.9.2), e.g.: "There are two persons: one whom he hates, and one who hates him. Surely, he should cut off the necks of both, successively." This mantra, which is frequently recited, has a purely ritual use: it is recited when the soil is prepared for sacrificial use with the help of a ritual implement, the wooden knife (*sphya*). This rite is put in perspective by another brāhmaṇa (Taittirīya Saṃhitā 2.6.4.3), which explains that the enemy has to be excluded from the altar, adding that the making of an altar is a cruel act.

Though the description of the śrauta sūtras is concerned with ritual, there are occasional references to enemies of flesh and blood. When the clay for the ukhā pot is being collected, the adhvaryu should recite, among others, a very innocent sounding mantra: "In the way of the Aṅgirasas, we are going to fetch Agni hidden in the mud" (Taittirīya Saṃhitā 4.1.2.2 g). When should this mantra be recited? When an enemy (*dveṣya*) is met on the way (Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra 16.2.6, with Caland's note; cf. Heesterman 1967, 37; Keith 1914, 290, note 5). Similarly, when the ground for the fire altar is being prepared, the adhvaryu casts lumps of clay around, turning clockwise, and taking the last lump from the direction of his enemy (Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra 16.20.6; cf. Keith 1914, 318 note 9). Here the corresponding brāhmaṇa (Taittirīya Saṃhitā 5.2.5.6) merely states that the person who is in that quarter is hungry. Such references to enemies in the śrauta sūtras are not to ritual enemies or demons, as students of religion may be predisposed to expect. These enemies are real people, belonging to the original population. Heesterman has established the significance of several such passages, to which I shall return in a later section.

Rau (1957, 31) has some worthwhile things to say about many widespread prejudices with regard to the Vedic Indians. Life in those days was not

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easy, neither for the Vedic nomads nor for the people they encountered. The Vedic texts repeatedly assert that the greatest enemy of man is hunger. The struggle for land and lebensraum was a struggle for survival. Rau concluded that there is no evidence in support of the view that the Vedic Indians "lived in a land of plenty, and had nothing better to do than lie under trees in lovely natural settings, meditate on questions of metaphysics and kneel before lotus flowers as gentle and beautiful people" (*lebten . . . in einem Schlaraffenland and hatten nichts anders zu tun, als in landschaftlich lieblichen Gegenden, unter Baumen gelagert, den Problemen der Metaphysik nachzusinnen oder als schöne, stille Menschen vor Lotusblumen zu knien*).

It is not surprising that the ritual is not merely compared to a chariot, but that the ritual implements are considered weapons (Heesterman 1962, 35). As we have already seen, the ritual recitations from the R̥gveda were called śastra, a term derived from the verbal śas-, "recite," which is homonymous with śastra, "sword," from śas-, "cut down." The Vedic nomads fought battles on many levels.

SOMA

SO FAR WE have met with Soma in a variety of contexts. We have seen that the Vedic Indians evolved a hierarchy of Soma rituals. In each of these, Agni and Soma are the chief dramatis personae. They also occur among the ancient Iranians. In India, an Agnicayana may be optionally built in the place of the offering altar for the āhavaniya fire of a Soma ritual. In this book, the Agnicayana will receive more attention than the Soma rituals, partly because of limitations of space, and partly because the prototype of the Soma rituals, the Agniṣṭoma, has been fully described by Caland and Henry. However, one cannot but agree with Wasson that "it cannot be gainsaid that Vedic culture with Soma unidentified is the play of Hamlet with Hamlet left out" (Wasson 1968, 7).

We have seen that Soma is a god, a plant, and the liquid extracted from that plant. From the Brāhmaṇas onwards, the ritualists made use of substitutes for the original Soma. These include Ephedra, Sarcostemma, and other creepers and plants without particularly remarkable properties. There are now two serious theories regarding the identity of the original Soma: Wasson's theory that it was the hallucinogenic mushroom *Amanita muscaria*, or fly agaric (Wasson 1968), and Flattery's theory that it was the hallucinogenic plant *Peganum harmala*, or wild rue (Flattery, forthcoming). Wasson's book is widely available, and Mr. Flattery has given me access to the manuscript of his book prior to its publication. This is not the place to adjudicate between the two theories, which are both presented and argued with great skill and with considerable amounts of evidence (mostly Indian in the case

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of Wasson, and Iranian in the case of Flattery). Although Flattery's work may not be published before the present work appears, Wasson's has already been widely discussed. Wasson's identification has been accepted or regarded as probable by some Sanskrit scholars (Kuiper 1970, Ingalls 1971), and rejected by at least one other (Brough 1971), and he has replied to his critics (Wasson 1970, 1972). Wasson's thesis implies, but is not implied by, a weaker thesis, namely that the original Vedic Soma was a hallucinogenic plant. I regard this as the most important part of Wasson's hypothesis, the part, moreover, that has not to my knowledge been seriously challenged. It is certainly accepted by Flattery. I think, in fact, that the validity of this weaker thesis can be taken as established.

One of Wasson's arguments in support of the view that Soma was the fly agaric is the shamanistic use of the fly agaric as a hallucinogen in different parts of Siberia. Though Brough has ruled out the probative value of such parallels (Brough 1971, 332), it cannot be denied that circumstantial evidence of this type is obviously evidence too (as Brough accepts at least in practice). Moreover, in the domain of a historical hypothesis, we cannot expect anything like a final proof; we are dealing with degrees of probability. Flattery, too, has referred to parallels, without even ascribing possible historical connections. The chief active drug in *Peganum harmala* is harmine, which is also the main active ingredient in *Banisteriopsis*, the *yajé* of the upper Amazon (Flattery, §§ 36–38). The connections between the beliefs of the Vedic nomads and shamanistic beliefs, to which I have referred several times, add to the plausibility of Wasson's hypothesis, but they also support Flattery's theory: *Peganum harmala* is available, in fact conspicuous, throughout the "Greater Iranian area," viz., "west of China, north of India, east of the civilizations of Mesopotamia . . . , and south of the subarctic forests of Siberia" (Flattery, §§ 28, 42–45).

Like the use and worship of fire, the use and worship of hallucinogens takes us back to the prehistory and early history of mankind. Though archaeological evidence for the use of hallucinogens is scarce, historical evidence from various areas is available, and anthropological evidence is plentiful. The sum of evidence points to a human experience almost as ancient and widespread as the experience of fire. That this has been discovered only recently is due to recent fashions, but also to the scarcity of material evidence in combination with the bias of our own culture, which regards material evidence as more patently obvious than psychological evidence.

The use of mushrooms is attested for the Neolithic (Boletes in the Swiss lake-dwelling cultures). We have already noted the ancient uses of fungi as tinder in the process of fire making. "Mushroom stones" from the Mayas, in what are now Mexico and Guatemala, constitute the oldest evidence for the cult of a hallucinogenic mushroom. The earliest of these stones date from the thirteenth to the tenth century B.C., the latest from 800–900 A.D.

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The Mayan mushroom stones generally represent a mushroom on top of an animal and are 20 to 35 centimeters high (Heim 1963, 206).

The idea of a herb of immortality, most probably a hallucinogen, is at least as old as the Sumerian Gilgamesh epic, which takes us back to about 2,000 B.C. Wasson has suggested that the Taoist belief in "magic mushrooms" constitutes evidence of systematic ritual use of hallucinogenic substances, and Needham has endorsed this view (Needham 1974, V, 121). Needham also suggests that the Taoists generated hallucinogenic smokes in their incense burners (ibid., 150–154). In recent times, the use of hallucinogens of plant origin has been found in all parts of the world, especially in the Americas (for a survey see Schultes 1969). Apart from mushrooms (see especially Heim 1963), these include cacti, shrubs, various leguminous trees, and seeds that are eaten, drunk, smoked, or sniffed. Many of these plants are considered sacred. The Mexican Indians regarded them as mediators with the gods. The Chontal Indians of Oaxaca call their hallucinogenic shrub "leaf of god," and the Aztecs refer to the sacred mushroom as "god's flesh" (Schultes 1969, 254; Wasson 1972, 47). In a characteristic reversal, the Christian invaders of Mexico called the Aztec *ololiuqui* (Morning Glory) a "diabolic seed" (Schultes 252).

One of the best arguments for the hallucinogenic character of Soma is the Vedic distinction between the effects of Soma and the effects of *surā*, a fermented drink. While Soma leads to "ecstasy," "happiness," or "rapture" (*mada*, *sumada*), *surā* produces "evil intoxication" (*durmada*). O'Flaherty refers in this connection to Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 5.1.2.10: "Soma is truth, prosperity, light; and *surā* untruth, misery, darkness" (Wasson 1968, 95, 137, etc.). The *surā* beverage is used in some of the classical Vedic rituals, e.g., in the Vājapeya and in the Sautrāmaṇī.

In the Vedic rituals, Soma is introduced into the sacrificial enclosure at the ceremony of *somakraya*, "purchase of Soma." The Soma merchant and the adhvaryu (on behalf of the yajamāna) engage in ritual haggling about the price, but in the end the Soma stalks are taken away by force and the merchant is beaten with a stick and driven away. According to Renou, these ceremonies show that the traffic in Soma may at one time have been illegal. At the same time we are reminded of the fact that Soma, like Agni, was considered stolen from heaven, and again stolen back from the demons (O'Flaherty 1976, 99–104).

According to the R̥gveda, Soma is the elixir of life, indispensable for both men and gods. It is *amṛtam*, the draught of immortality. This term is Indo-European: *amṛtam* (English "immortality") corresponds, for example, to the Greek *ἀμβροσία* (for the development of these and related words in Sanskrit and Greek, see Thieme 1952, 15–34). Indra is especially fond of Soma. Soma and Agni are in many ways connected, as we have seen. Soma has various properties in common with other Vedic gods. He is treated as a king and invoked as a fighting god, a valiant commander, a hero, and a

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destroyer of enemies (Gonda 1965, 52). Soma, in this respect again similar to Agni, was brought down from heaven by a bird of prey (śyena).

The Iranian evidence seems to suggest that the haoma was fairly common. According to the Ṛgveda, the Soma plant grew in the mountains, and the best Soma came from Mount Mūjavant (which probably corresponds to the Muñjavant of the later epic). The mountains referred to are presumably those of the Western Himalayas and the Hindukush. That Soma, according to the Ṛgveda, grew in the mountains is consistent with Wasson's hypothesis. Though the fly agaric grows at sea level in northern Eurasia, it is found south of the Oxus and in India only at a great height, around 8,000 to 16,000 feet (Wasson 1968, 23, referring to birches and conifers, with which the fly agaric grows in mycorrhizal relation). If we had some means of identifying the routes that the Indo-Iranians travelled, it would be worthwhile to look there, even at present, for *Amanita muscaria* and other hallucinogenic plants. Actually, we do have some evidence, provided we assume that the Indo-Europeans followed some of the same ancient trade routes that Buddhism travelled two millennia later in the opposite direction.

The relative ease with which Buddhism entered Central Asia and was accepted there may make us pause and reflect on the significance of these mountainous areas where the Soma grew. Vedic culture is generally approached from two perspectives: a linguistic perspective that stresses the Indo-European background, and a religious perspective that stresses the Hindu sequel. The history of India and Central Asia taken together shows that such labels are misleading and that the Buddhist migrations are part of the story. Not only Central-Asian Buddhism, but Buddhism in general, contains many elements that are shamanistic. It is becoming increasingly clear that the Vedic nomads introduced shamanistic elements into India. Though Buddhism is generally characterized as a reaction against the Vedic religion, this is a rather sweeping generalization. Closer inspection of the facts would show that there has been at least as much continuity as there has been opposition. The myths of Indra and the legends of the Buddha, for example, have many features in common. The techniques of immortality, which evolved in the Upaniṣads from a ritual background, are similar to Yoga and to Buddhist techniques. Many of these notions contain shamanistic elements that the Vedic nomads took from Central Asia to India, and that the Buddhists took back 2,000 years later. From the perspective of Central Asia, these shamanistic ideas and practices, which continued to exist in their original homeland, merely returned after a long holiday in India. The labels we attach to the major civilizations and religions of the area obscure the fact that the underlying reality is probably better described as a continuous exchange of people, goods, and ideas between India and Central Asia.

India is often pictured as an isolated country, separated from the rest of the world by a formidable barrier of mountains. Though this often leads

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to the unnecessary assumption that India is a land of mystery, there is some truth in the geographical observation. At the same time, it should not be exaggerated. The western route linking the Indus and the Oxus, passing through northeast Afghanistan, though long, is not very arduous. Further east, the valley of the upper Indus in what is now Ladakh (northwest India) and the Tarim basin in what is now Sinkiang (western China) are separated by about 250 miles of mountainous tracks. Even with a pass of 18,000 feet on the way, such a distance can be covered on foot in less than a month, at least during the summer.

Now let us follow the story of Soma after it entered the Indian subcontinent. The original Soma was soon lost. From the period of the Brāhmaṇas, it was replaced by substitutes, because the Vedic nomads had left the mountains (Wasson), or at any rate the "Greater Iranian area" (Flattery), and Soma did not grow in the Indian plains. It is significant that with the gradual disappearance of the original Soma the rituals became increasingly complex. Similar circumstances prevail elsewhere. The best Peyote comes from the Rio Grande Valley, where it also grows most abundantly. The Indians of the southern tribes go on ceremonial collection trips to get it. But the Indians of the northern tribes are further away, have to secure their supply through the mail, and incorporate less Peyote in their ceremonies. At the same time, they begin their ceremonies with purification by means of purges, sweat baths, and fasting. Fischer (1958, 401) has suggested that these additional ceremonies, together with the more limited quantities of Peyote, serve the purpose of producing an experience of similar intensity as that evoked solely by larger doses of Peyote. Heim (1963, 211) reports that the Mexicans perform two kinds of rituals in connection with their hallucinogenic mushrooms: in one, only mushrooms are consumed; in the other, mushrooms are consumed, but there is also a distribution of grains of maize. This second variety is *imprégné de processus magique*. Closer to home, announcements of rock concerts boast that the audience will get high without the use of drugs. In all these cases, ritual takes over where the hallucinogen itself is in limited supply or is altogether absent. Ṛgveda 7.26.1 asserts that the effects of Soma do not depend on mere ingestion: "Soma unpressed has never inebriated Indra, nor the pressed juice unaccompanied by sacred hymns." It seems likely, therefore, that the increasing complexity of the Soma rituals is a direct consequence of the decreasing availability of the original Soma (cf. Staal 1975, 182-183). Again we witness a development similar to what we found before. This time a substance that is no longer available is preserved, but only ritually.

A simple example of such ritualization is the *Āpyāyana* rite. From the time Soma is purchased and enthroned south of the (old) offering altar until the Soma-pressing day, this rite is performed twice daily, in the morning and in the evening preceding the Pravargya. First the agnidh boils water. All the priests, except the Sāmavedins, wash their hands in that water. Then,

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one by one, standing to the west of the Soma bundle, they touch King Soma and recite: "Stem for stem, O god Soma, swell for Indra who gains his share of wealth. Let Indra swell for you, and you swell for Indra" (Taittiriya Samhitā 1.2.11.1 a). The yajamāna adds: "Make your friends swell with booty and skill; may I successfully accomplish your pressing, O god Soma" (ibid. b). From the first time this rite is performed until the time when Soma and Agni are carried forth to the new offering altar, the priests should wash their hands only in boiled water.

The texts mention an alternative to the mere recitation of these mantras: the recitations may be accompanied by sprinkling the Soma bundle with the same warm water that had been boiled. Here lies the origin of the rite. The Soma plants were dried at the time they were acquired and had to swell by gradually absorbing water. In the course of the process of ritualization, Soma is no longer sprinkled with water but it is sprinkled with mantras. This is characteristic of Vedic ritual and reflects the Vedic belief in the power of language. For most ritual purposes, performing an act in words is as good as acting. In later times, rites are entirely replaced by recitations and, in the final resort, by inaudible meditations.

The Āpyāyana rite supports Wasson's hypothesis in a direct way. Two of the psychotropically active ingredients of *Amanita muscaria* are ibotenic acid and muscimol:

When the fly agaric dries, the ibotenic acid steadily disintegrates and disappears. It is replaced by muscimol, which is at least five times more powerful. Thus we have the unique situation where a psychotomimetic agent converts itself through simple drying into another active agent that is more potent by far and more stable (Wasson 1972, 12).

The quantity of muscimol which has thus been reached remains constant when the substance is again mixed with water, milk, curds, or other liquids.

It is likely that the precise treatment that the Soma substitutes receive in the ritual process leading up to the extraction of the juice will throw additional light on the identity of the original Soma. Such manipulations would have been preserved in ritual even if they were no longer functional, for as we have seen many times, preservation of features that have ceased to be functional is one of the chief characteristics of ritual. The exact quantities and proportions used in mixtures are, moreover, important in determining the psychotropic properties of hallucinogens (Waser 1967, 435, for example, reports considerable differences when the effects of 10 mg. muscimol are compared with those of 15 mg.). It is therefore relevant to determine how the Soma was measured and mixed with other substances.

While the geographical origin of Soma lies in the high mountains of the western Himalayas, its mythical origin lies in heaven. This belief expresses

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the divine character of Soma and links it directly to Agni. Here the background is not only shamanistic (as Wasson has shown) but also Indo-European, the two probably being related (cf. Map A). In his famous book on the descent of fire and the divine beverage (1859, already, quoted), Adalbert Kuhn has shown that in all the major Indo-European languages—among the Indians, Greeks, Romans, and Germans—similar ideas are found about the celestial origin of fire and of the draught of immortality. Both originate primarily in clouds, from which lightning and rain come down. The celestial fire is also related to the sun and is conceived in terms of kindling by friction. The kindling stick is the thunderbolt, which is known by various names: *vajra* among the Indians, *κεραυνός* among the Greeks, *cuneus* among the Romans, and *Donnerkeil* among the Germans. The phallic character of these objects, though not emphasized by Kuhn, springs to mind.

The drink of immortality (*amṛta*, *ἀμβροσία*) descends from heaven in a similar manner. The Indian myths of the churning of the ocean show that the production of this elixir is thought of in terms similar to the production of fire by friction. The bird of prey—an eagle, vulture, or falcon—which brings the draught and fire down to earth, is associated with a celestial tree in which he has his nest and whose branches provide the torch in which fire is transported. In Europe the celestial tree is often an ash. As we have seen, the theft of fire and Soma is generally attributed to a bird, but may also be attributed to a personage such as Prometheus, whose name Kuhn related to the kindling stick (*pramanthana*).

The R̥gveda relates how the bird brought Soma down to earth from a mountain. Since Soma is a person, this act has the character of an abduction, as Schneider (1971) has stressed. The bird helped Indra to obtain Soma, and both boasted of their prowess, as did Prometheus (above pages 84–85). In general, such legends are interwoven with references to numerous other stories. Some of these are no longer understood, and I shall not try to make them intelligible. In the following two hymns from the R̥gveda, a demon, Śambara, is mentioned, who was also interested in Soma and tried to keep the bird from getting it. The chief enemy of Śambara was Divodāsa Atithigva. Puraṇdhi, possibly "giving fullness," refers to the bird.

R̥gveda 4.26 is spoken by Indra (the translation mostly follows Schneider 1971):

1. I became Manu and Sūrya; I am Kakṣivat, the wise seer; I invited Kutsa, the son of Arjuna; I am the inspired Uśanas—look at me!
2. I gave the earth to the Āryas; I gave rain to the mortal who offers sacrifice. I brought the thundering waters; the gods follow my purpose.

अहं मनुष्यं सूर्यं च
ऽहं कक्षीवाँ ऋषिरस्मि विप्रः ।
अहं कुत्सं मार्जुनेयं नृपञ्ज-
ऽहं कृविश्वानां पश्यता सा ॥
अहं भूमिमददामार्योया-
ऽहं वृष्टिं दाशुषे मर्त्योय ।
अहमपो अनयं वावशाना
मम देवासो अनु केतमायन् ॥

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3. Ecstatic with Soma, I shattered the ninety-nine fortresses of Śambara all at once, and finally his citadel as the hundredth, helping Divodāsa Atithigva.
4. O Maruts, let the bird with lovely wings be above all birds, the swift-flying griffon above all griffons, since—by his own driving power that needs no chariot wheels—he brought Manu the oblation offered to the gods.
5. Trembling, whether he could bring it down, the bird swift as thought shot forth on the wide path; swiftly the griffon came with the Soma honey and won fame for that.
6. Stretching out in flight, holding the sprout, the griffon brought the inebriating and gladdening drink; the bird, companion of the gods, held the Soma tight as he took it from that higher heaven.
7. When the griffon had taken the Soma, he brought it, a thousand and ten thousand sacrificial draughts at once; Puramdhi left the enemies behind; ecstatic with Soma, the wise one left the fools.

अहं पुरो मन्दसानो व्यैरं
नव साकं नवतीः शम्बरस्य ।
शततमं वेद्यं सवेताता
दिवोदासमतिथिगवं यदावम् ॥
प्र सु ष विभ्यो मरुतो विरस्तु
प्र श्येनः श्येनेभ्य आशुपत्वा ।
अचक्रया यत् स्वधया सुपर्णो
हव्यं भरन्मनवे देवजुष्टम् ॥

भरद् यदि विरतो वेविजानः
पथोरुणा मनोजवा असर्जि ।
तयै ययौ मधुना सोम्येनो-
त श्रवो विविदे श्येनो अत्र ॥
ऋजीपी श्येनो ददमानो अंशुं
परावतः शकुनो मन्दं मदम् ।
सोमं भरद् दादहाणो देवावान्
दिवो अमुष्मादुत्तरादाय ॥

आदाय श्येनो अभरत् सोमं
सहस्रं सुवां अयुतं च साकम् ।
अत्रा पुरंधिरजहादराती-
मंदे सोमस्य मूरा अमूरः ॥

The next hymn, R̥gveda 4.27, is spoken by Soma:

1. While still in the womb of my mother, I knew all the successive generations of the gods. A hundred iron fortresses guarded me, but the griffon and I swiftly flew away.
2. He did not drag me out against my will, for I surpassed him in energy and strength. In a flash, Puramdhi left the enemies behind, as he outran the winds, swollen (with Soma).
3. As the griffon came shrieking down from heaven, or from here, they carried Puramdhi. As the archer Kṛṣṇanu, with swift thought, slackened his bowstring and shot at him.
4. The griffon, stretching out in swift flight, brought Soma down from the great heights to Indra's camp, as the Aśvins brought

गर्भे नु सन्नन्वेषामवेद-
महं देवानां जनिमानि विश्वा ।
शतं मा पुर आयसीररक्ष-
न्नधे श्येनो जवसा निरदीयम् ॥
न घा स मामप जोषं जभारा-
ऽभीमांस त्वक्षसा वीर्येण ।
ईमां पुरंधिरजहादराती-
रुत वातां अतरच्छुवानः ॥

अव यच्छ्येनो अस्त्रेनीदध यो-
र्वि यद् यदि वात ऊहुः पुरंधिम ।
सृजद् यदस्मा अवं ह क्षिपज्ज्यां
कृशानुरस्ता मनसा भुरण्यन् ॥

ऋजिप्य ईमिन्द्रावतो न भुज्युं
श्येनो जभार बृहतो अधि णोः ।

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Bhujyu out of the sea; inside fell a wing feather from the bird as he kept the course of his flight.

5. The white goblet overflowing with Soma mixed with cow's milk, the clear juice offered by the adhvaryus, the finest honey—now let the generous Indra raise it to drink until ecstatic with Soma; let the hero raise it to drink until ecstatic with Soma.

अन्तः पतत् पतत्र्यस्य पूर्ण-
मध्र यामनि प्रसितस्य तद् वेः ॥

अधं श्वेतं कलशं गोभिरक्त-
मापिष्यान् मधवां शुक्रमन्थः ।
अध्वर्युभिः प्रयतं मध्वो अग्र-
मिन्द्रो मदाय प्रति ध्रुव पिबध्वै
शूरो मदाय प्रति ध्रुव पिबध्वै ॥

The basic conviction underlying the Soma rituals is the belief that drinking Soma yields immortality. This belief is still alive. In the course of an interview on the significance of the ritual, Cherumukku Vaidikan, chief organizer of the 1975 performance, recited the relevant verse from the R̥gveda (8.48.3; cf. below, page 617):

We have drunk Soma, we have become immortal,
We have come to the light, we have found the gods.
What can the enmity, what can the intrigue
of any mortal do to us now, o immortal one?

THE COSMIC MAN

EGGELING (1897, IV, xiv-xv) WAS PROBABLY the first to suggest that the Agnicayana is connected with a late hymn of the R̥gveda, the *Puruṣa-sūkta* or "Hymn of the Cosmic Man" (R̥gveda 10.90). This hymn is relatively recent because it occurs in the tenth and most recent book of the R̥gveda, and because it refers by name to the three Vedas (ṛk, sāman, and yajus) and (for the first and only time in the R̥gveda) to the four classes (*brāhmaṇa*, *rājanya*, *vaiśya*, and *śūdra*). The *Puruṣasūkta* is attributed to a seer called Nārāyaṇa, and consists of sixteen verses:

1. Puruṣa has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. He pervades the earth everywhere and extends beyond for ten fingers' breadth.
2. Puruṣa himself is all this, whatever has been, and whatever is to be. He is the lord of immortality and also lord of that which grows on food.
3. Such is his greatness, and Puruṣa is yet greater than this. All creatures make up a quarter of him; three quarters are the immortal in heaven.

सहस्रशीर्षा पुरुषः सहस्राक्षः सहस्रपात् ।
स भूमिं विश्वतो वृत्वाऽत्यतिष्ठद्दशङ्गुलम् ॥

पुरुष एवेदं सर्वं यद्वृत्तं यन्न भव्यम् ।
उतामृतत्वस्थेऽनो यदन्नैनातिरोहति ॥

एतावानस्य महिमाऽतो ज्यायैश्च पूरुषः ।
पादोऽस्य विश्वा भूतानि त्रिपादस्यामृतं दिवि ॥

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4. With three quarters Puruṣa has risen above, and one quarter of him still remains here, whence he spread out everywhere, pervading that which eats and that which does not eat. त्रिपादूर्ध्व उदैत् पुरुषः पादोऽस्येहामभवत् पुनः । ततो विध्वङ् व्यक्रामत् साशनानशने अभि ॥
5. From him Virāj was born, and from Virāj came Puruṣa, who, having been born, ranged beyond the earth in the west and in the east. तस्माद्विराजं जायत विराजो अग्निं पूरुषः । स जातो अत्यरिच्यत पश्चाद्भूमिस्थो पुरः ॥
6. When the gods performed the sacrifice, using Puruṣa as the offering, spring was the clarified butter, summer the fuel, autumn the oblation. यत् पुरुषेण हविषा देवा यज्जमतेन्यत । वसन्तो अस्यासीदाज्यं ग्रीष्म इध्मः शरद्विः ॥
7. They sprinkled Puruṣa, the sacrifice, born at the beginning, upon the sacred grass. With him the gods, Sādhyas, and sages sacrificed. तं यज्जं ब्रह्मिणि ग्रीष्मं पुरुषं जातमग्रतः । तेन देवा अयजन्त साध्या ऋषयश्च ये ॥
8. From that sacrifice in which everything was offered the clarified butter was obtained, and they made it into those beasts who live in the air, in the forest, and in villages. तस्माद्यज्ञात् सर्वदुतः संभृतं पृथदाज्यम् । पशून् तौश्वक्रे वायव्यानारुणान् ग्राम्याश्च ये ॥
9. From that sacrifice in which everything was offered the verses and chants were born, the meters were born, and the formulas were born. तस्माद्यज्ञात् सर्वदुत ऋचः सामानि जज्ञिरे । छन्दोसि जज्ञिरे तस्माद्यज्ञस्तस्मादजायत ॥
10. From it horses were born, and those other animals that have a double set of incisors; cows were born from it, and goats and sheep were born from it. तस्मादध्वो अजायन्त ये के चोभयादतः । गावो ह जज्ञिरे तस्मात् तस्माज्जाता अजावयः ॥
11. When they divided Puruṣa, into how many parts did they disperse him? What became of his mouth, what of his arms, what were his two thighs and his two feet called? यत् पुरुषं व्यदधुः कतिधा व्यकल्पयन् । मुखं किमस्य कौ बाहू का ऊरु पादौ उच्येते ॥
12. His mouth was the brahmin, his arms were made into the chieftains, his two thighs were the tribesmen, and from his feet the servants were born. ब्राह्मणोऽस्य मुखमासीद्बाहू राजन्यः कृतः । ऊरु तदस्य यद्वैश्यः पदयोः शूद्रो अजायत ॥
13. The moon was born from his mind; the sun was born from his eye. From his mouth came Indra and Agni, and from his breath the Wind was born. चन्द्रमा मनसो जातश्चक्षुः सूर्यो अजायत । मुखादिन्द्रश्चाग्निश्च प्राणाद्वायुरजायत ॥
14. From his navel the atmosphere was born; from his head the heaven appeared. From नाभ्यां आसीदन्तरिक्षं शीर्ष्णो द्यौः समवर्तत ।

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- his two feet came the earth, and the regions of the sky from his ear. Thus they fashioned the worlds. पदयोः भूमिर्दिशः श्रोत्रान् तथा लोकोः अकल्पयन् ॥
15. There were seven enclosing fire sticks for him, and thrice seven fire sticks when the gods, performing the sacrifice, bound down Puruṣa as the sacrificial victim. सप्तास्यासन् परिधयाग्निः सप्त समिधः कृताः । देवा यज्जं तन्वाना अबध्नन् पुरुषं पशुम् ॥
 16. With this sacrifice the gods sacrificed; these were the first dharmas. And these powers reached the dome of heaven where dwell the ancient Sādhyas and gods. यज्ञेन यज्जमयजन्त देवा-
स्तानि धर्माणि प्रथमान्यासन् ।
ते ह नार्कं महिमानः सचन्त
यज्ञं पूर्वं साध्याः सन्ति देवाः ॥

In other cultures, similar primeval giants are regarded as the origin and material cause of the universe. Within the Indo-European family, such a giant occurs in Norse mythology, where he is called Ymir, and in Iran, where he is called Gayōmart. Gayōmart was the first man, and in some respects quite different from Puruṣa. As for the mythical similarities between Gayōmart and Puruṣa, "there seems to be every reason to believe that this is a case of Indian influence on Iranian thought" (Zaehner 1955, 137). According to Norman Brown (1931), the Puruṣa of R̥gveda 10.90 does not draw his importance, either genetically or ideologically, from any connection with such Indo-European relatives. Brown (1931, 114) has argued that Puruṣa is "most significantly a secondary derivation from notions established antecedently in the R̥gveda." In particular, Puruṣa is a combination of characteristics derived from Agni, Sūrya (the Sun), and Viṣṇu. For a detailed demonstration of this view, as well as detailed comments on individual verses of the Puruṣa hymn, the reader is referred to Brown's study.

The idea of a cosmic sacrifice, in which a primeval person creates the world through his own sacrifice and dismemberment, is the basic theory of ritual adopted in the Brāhmaṇas. Here Prajāpati takes the place of Puruṣa. We have already seen how Śaṇḍilya expressed these ideas with special reference to the Agnicayana (above pages 65, 67). Several specific features of the Agnicayana refer to Puruṣa. The most important is the golden Puruṣa (hiraṇmayapuruṣa), who is buried under the first layer. When he is laid down, the Puruṣa-sāman is sung. Though this sāman comes from the Aranyageyagāna section of the Sāmaveda (consisting of "songs to be sung in the forest"), and consists almost entirely of stobhas (meaningless syllables), the word *sahasra*, "thousand," occurs in it and reminds us of the Puruṣa hymn. When the altar is completed and the yajamāna is about to wish that the bricks turn into cows, the adhvaryu puts a thousand pieces of gold on the altar with the recitation of Taittirīya Saṃhitā 4.4.11.30: "You are the measure of a thousand, you are the image of a thousand, you are the size of a thousand, you are the replica of a thousand, you are of a thousand, you for a thousand!" This is also reminiscent of R̥gveda 10.90. Furthermore,

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at the sacrifice of the he-goat for Prajāpati in the Agnicayana, the number of firewood sticks prescribed is twenty-one or twenty-four, which is in accordance with verse 15 of the Puruṣa hymn (see Taittiriya Saṃhitā 5.1.8.5; the number of beans put in the openings of the human head is also twenty-one).

The term Puruṣa occurs in four other hymns of the Ṛgveda, once in a general sense and three times in an Agni context (Brown 1931, 108–109). Prajāpati, “lord of creatures” (originally “lord of offspring”? Oldenberg 1919, 27) also appears four times in the Ṛgveda, all occurrences in the tenth book. One passage may have been added later as an answer to the preceding part of the hymn with its repeated refrain: “Who is the god we shall worship with oblations?” The answer is: Prajāpati (Ṛgveda 10.121.10). The Puruṣa hymn occurs in the Atharvaveda (Renou 1955a, 436–438) and elsewhere in Vedic literature. Puruṣa is later identified with Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa (Shende 1965).

Prajāpati as the creator god incorporates earlier ideas of creation in the Ṛgveda. The mythology of Yama, “Death,” is replete with notions of creation and self-immolation (Dandekar 1945). The complex of Ṛgvedic myths that describe the fight between Indra and the demon Vṛtra, can be interpreted in terms of (Indo-European) creation myths (e.g., Brown 1942). But this mythology also admits a more specific interpretation. In a note to a passage where Indra is described as freeing rivers for man (Ṛgveda 1.165.8), Geldner referred to the Aryan invasion. Kosambi (1956, 70–71), following Renou and Benveniste’s analysis of the meaning of *vṛtra* as “obstacle,” “barrage,” or “bloquage,” interpreted the slaying of Vṛtra as the breaking up of dams. According to Kosambi, the fight is not with demons, but shows that the Aryans destroyed the system of dams upon which the indigenous irrigation and agriculture depended. Indra, in that case, is not creator of the universe but creator of *lebensraum* for the Vedic nomads.

In the Yajurveda, Atharvaveda (cf. Renou 1955, 31–48), and in many Brāhmaṇas, Prajāpati has become creator god, god of sacrifice, and sacrifice itself. After procreating the beings that make up this world, he is spent and empty, and has to be strengthened again through ritual. This is elaborated in various myths, on which Keith comments with characteristic charity: “the details of these stupid myths are wholly unimportant” (Keith 1925, 442).

Sylvain Lévi noted that Prajāpati’s creative activity is generally expressed by the verb *srj/sarj*, “emit, discharge,” and often by *nir-mā*, “mete out, measure, build” (1898 = 1966, 18; for the following see Lévi 1898, 13–35, and Oldenberg 1919, 26–32). We have already seen that there may be a reference to the surveying of land. The same terms are used in any case when the adhvaryu measures the mahāvedi. There are other accounts of Prajāpati’s dismemberment and of his parts becoming parts of the universe. Elsewhere, his creative activity is described in sexual terms. As he is the father, this

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involves incest, in particular with his daughter. He also unites with Vāc, “speech, language,” for the act of creation is as inseparable from creative language as ritual act is from mantra.

Prajāpati created the gods, who subsequently put him together again through sacrifice. Agni is born first, from Prajāpati’s mouth. But since Agni is the eater of food, viz., the devourer of everything, Prajāpati reflected: “there is no other food here but myself—but surely he would never eat me.” But Agni, the ungrateful child, turned to him with wide open mouth and Prajāpati, terrified, could only save himself by reproducing himself. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 2.2.4 relates this when commenting upon the Agnihotra ritual: whoever performs the Agnihotra, knowing this, “reproduces himself by offspring just as Prajāpati reproduced himself; and saves himself from Agni, Death, about to devour him” (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 2.2.4.7). Because of this, rebirth and regeneration are cyclical, and Prajāpati is identified with the year, or with time. He is also “definite and indefinite,” or only “indefinite”; and “limited and unlimited,” or only “unlimited.”

Despite vague similarities with the Greek Kronos and the Iranian Zurvan, both connected with time, it seems fair to say that Prajāpati, even if consistent with other Ṛgvedic notions, has no clear Indo-European or even Indo-Iranian counterparts. He is rather loosely connected with the Soma ritual: “He plays only a very unimportant role in the sequence of Soma rituals, which have been relatively well fixed from early times on. Undoubtedly, the references to him have superficially been inserted afterwards” (*In dem von altersher vergleichsweise fest geordneten Somaopfer spielt er nur eine ganz nebensächliche Rolle. Unzweifelhaft sind die Beziehungen auf ihn da nur nachträglich und oberflächlich eingefügt*: Oldenberg 1919, 31).

The idea of a god sacrificing himself is preserved in the ritual: the sacrificer, or *yajamāna*, is sometimes identified with the sacrificial victim. Coomaraswamy (1942) has collected some of the relevant passages (providing them with interpretations which Gonda (1960, 193 note 24), calls “confused and debatable in their details”: *verworren und in Einzelheiten anfechtbar*). The idea of self-sacrifice is basic to the Prajāpati cosmology and to the cyclical conquest of death through rebirth, which characterize the śrauta ritual in general and the Agnicayana in particular.

When humans talk of self-sacrifice, there is an implied reference to human sacrifice. According to Eggeling (commenting upon Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 1.2.3.5), animal sacrifices replaced human sacrifices, just as vegetable oblations (in particular *puroḍāśa* cakes) replace or stand for animal sacrifices. Earlier, Weber had devoted a special study to human sacrifices in the Vedic period (Weber 1864, 262–287 = 1868, 54–89), in which he showed that there are unmistakable echoes of human sacrifice in the ritual literature, but that the classical ritualists often obliterated them. Weber’s observations were developed and modified in several later publications, e.g., Rönnow (1929), Mus (1935), and Heesterman (1967). I shall survey some of these

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observations with special reference to the Agnicayana. It will be useful, though, to keep in mind a just remark of Macdonald (1952, 337 = 1975, 8):

It is because of preconceived ideas about the practice and development of the idea of the substitute-sacrifice that researchers have a tendency to trace every sacrifice back to a human sacrifice.

Weber began his study with a quote from the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, following the passage that led to Eggeling's remark quoted above:

At first the gods offered a man as victim. When he was offered, the sacrificial juice went out of him. It entered the horse. They offered the horse. When it was offered, the sacrificial juice went out of it. It entered the ox. They offered the ox. When it was offered, the sacrificial juice went out of it. It entered the sheep. They offered the sheep. When it was offered, the sacrificial juice went out of it. It entered the goat. They offered the goat. When it was offered, the sacrificial juice went out of it (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 1.2.3.6).

The five heads buried under the Agnicayana altar are of a man, a horse, a bull, a ram, and a he-goat. The human head, which can be obtained in various ways, must be of a vaiśya ("tribesman"), or rājanya ("chieftain"). Weber concluded that a human sacrifice was part of the Agnicayana. He arrived at similar conclusions with regard to the Rājasūya ("royal consecration") and the Aśvamedha ("horse sacrifice"), and lastly described the one śrauta ritual which is explicitly called *Puruṣamedha*, "human sacrifice." In this ritual, the human victim, a brāhmaṇa or kṣatriya, is treated well for the duration of one full year, like the horse of the Aśvamedha. When this is over, he is adorned, decorated, and killed. The principal wife of the yajamāna lies down under the corpse. This is followed by obscene exchanges and riddles, as in the Aśvamedha. When the victim is killed, the udgātā priest chants a sāman for Yama, and the hotā recites the Puruṣa hymn from the R̥gveda.

The fact that this *Puruṣamedha* is described in only a few of the ritual sūtras has led to the view that it is a late and purely theoretical extension of the horse sacrifice. Keith (1925, 347–348) denied the existence of human sacrifice in Vedic India. Gonda (1960, 187, note 25) is "unconvinced" by Karmarkar (1942, 91–93), according to whom the Puruṣa hymn itself referred to human sacrifice. In Thite's view, the Brāhmaṇas know the rites that accompanied the killing of human victims, but do not prescribe the actual killing (Thite 1975, 27). There is no scholarly consensus whether the *Puruṣamedha* is an imitation ("upgrading": Puhvel 1970, 163) of the horse sacrifice, or vice versa, in which case it might be an ancient survival (a view de-

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fended in Kirfel 1951), or whether both sacrifices existed together from the beginning.

Rönnow (1929) has tried to show that human sacrifice prevailed in a pre-Vedic, "Asuric" religion, of which traces survive in the Pravargya, Agnicayana, and Sautrāmaṇī rituals. The human victim is represented by the demon Makha, who is subsequently identified with the sacrifice itself. The Pravargya is called the head of the sacrifice, without which it is incomplete, just as the *mahāvīra* vessel is regarded as the head of Makha. The same holds, mutatis mutandis, for the ukhā pot of the Agnicayana. While the ukhā pot, with the human head inside, is buried under the Agnicayana altar, the Pravargya implements, including the mahāvīra pots, are placed on the altar in a special configuration resembling the shape of a man. That the puroḍāśa cakes, which are substitutes for animal victims, are in fact connected with human sacrifice, is according to Rönnow shown by the fact that they are offered on "potsherds" (*kapāla*). The term *kapāla* means also (according to Rönnow, originally) "skull bones." The later Kāpālīka ascetics, who carry a skull, are named after it (cf. Lorenzen 1972). The connection is made in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (1.2.1.2): "The puroḍāśa cake is the head of the sacrifice: for those potsherds (*kapālāni*) are what the skull bones (*śiṣṇaḥ kapālāni*) are, and the ground rice is nothing but the brain" (cf. Eggeling, 1885, xxviii). When the human victim is killed, its juice (*rasa*) flows into the earth, which grows the rice out of which the puroḍāśa cakes are prepared. In the White Yajurveda, the heads of the five victims of the Agnicayana are kept in the sacrifice, but the bodies are thrown into water that is mixed with the clay from which some of the bricks for the altar are made.

Rönnow's thesis, that these sacrifices reflect an "Asuric" religion, derives mainly from texts of the Brāhmaṇa period. In the classical śrauta ritual, there is a prohibition against using certain parts of the animal victim, such as the head. This is explained by Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 3.8.3.29: "The Asuras made portions of the head, the shoulders, the neck, and the hind legs; therefore let him not make portions of these." According to Rönnow, beheading the victim was the typical form of sacrifice among the pre-Vedic, "Asuric" natives. These practices were brought in line with Brahmanic custom when they were incorporated into the classical ritual. In the Pravargya and in the Agnicayana there survives a tendency to preserve the body of the victim, so that the sacrificer can absorb its powerful *rasa* juice. This liquid is subsequently related to and identified with sacrificial beverages such as Soma and *gharma*, the boiled milk of the Pravargya.

Extending these ideas to the Sautrāmaṇī ritual, Rönnow arrived at the conclusion that three stages can be distinguished in the development of early Indian ritual. The first two of these are pre-Vedic: (1) a ritual relating to Namuci (according to the R̥gveda, a demon slain by Indra and the Aśvins), characterized by a human sacrifice at which blood is drunk together with

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with the alcoholic *surā*; (2) a ritual in which the new gods Sarasvatī and the Aśvins make their appearance, and during which milk and honey are consumed; and finally (3) a Vedic-brahmanic ritual, in which Soma is the ritual beverage.

Rönnow's thesis, that the Asuras represent a pre-Vedic Indian religion, has not been generally accepted. The reason for such scepticism is simple: in origin, the Asuras were clearly Indo-Iranian beings, called *ahura* in Iran. In Indo-Iranian, as in the older Ṛgveda, gods (*deva*, Iranian: *daêva*) and the asura/ahura are more or less on a par. In Iran, the Asuras prevailed. In the Vedas, the Devas prevailed, and the Asuras became their enemies. In spite of the Indo-Iranian origin of the word asura, it is therefore quite possible that Rönnow is right and that references in later Vedic literature to Asuras indicate indigenous, pre-Vedic practices and beliefs. I shall accept this as a working hypothesis, for it makes good sense as we shall see.

Mus (1935) dealt with the Agnicayana in the earlier parts of a monograph leading up to an interpretation of Borobudur, the Buddhist monument on Java. According to Mus, the myth of the dismemberment of Puruṣa/Prajāpati is not of Aryan origin. There are no references to it in the earlier Veda, but it is common "in the religious ethnography of South East Asia and its Pacific dependencies." Mus also observed that there is "attested, parallel to the myth, the practice of putting to death a human being for the collective profit of those who offered him, a sacrifice which is followed by a dismemberment, or even the dismemberment of the victim while he is still alive." He adds:

The cruel form which the sacrifice of *meriah* used to take, hardly more than a century ago among certain primitive tribes of India, is well known. The man was bound to the stake and each person tore off a piece of his flesh until there was nothing left of him. Then the participants would each go and bury his own portion in his best field (Mus 1935, *116).

Thus the sacrifice, by impregnating earth with parts of the human victim, contributed to the fertility of the soil.

Mus sees traces of such ideas and practices in a great variety of contexts. One of them is the belief in relics. In Buddhism, much importance is attached to the distribution of the relics of the Buddha, and their deposition within a stūpa. The Buddha is identified with these relics and with the stūpa just as in the Agnicayana the yajamāna is identified with the golden man and with the altar itself. The Sinhalese chronicles refer to relics as the life (*jīvita*) of the stūpa (Mus 1935, *75-77). The casting of images of the Buddha, and indeed the origin of idol worship itself, may originate in this context.

In the Agnicayana, a live tortoise (*kūrma*) is buried under the altar. Dumont (1957, 16-18) has shown that the tortoise was chosen as a symbol

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of the three worlds (earth, sky, and atmosphere) because of its domelike shape. The tortoise was, moreover, regarded as the juice or life sap (*medha* in Taittirīya Saṃhitā 5.2.8.5, erroneously translated by Keith as if it said *medhā*, "intelligence") of the earth: when Prajāpati created the earth and threw it into the waters, the juice that flowed from it became a tortoise.

Biardeau (1976, 18) has recalled that the importance of the tortoise (*kūrma*) lies also in its alleged etymological connection with the verb *kr-* "to do, to make" (cf. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 7.5.1.5-6). Another term for tortoise, *kaśyapa*, is a name of Prajāpati. Ruben (1939, 241-243) has referred to numerous legends among Indian tribes, and also in Central Asia and China, where the tortoise is described as support for the world, and is connected with its origin. In later times, the tortoise became an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, and in the myth of the churning of the world ocean, the churning staff or axis of the world rests on a tortoise (see, e.g., Gonda 1954, 126-129). In the Bhagavad Gītā (2.58), the sage is described as withdrawing his senses from external objects as the tortoise withdraws its limbs. It seems likely, from what we have seen before, that the lifesap of the tortoise is a remnant of the life sap or blood of the sacrificial victim that fertilizes the soil.

The investigations of Ruben (1939) are in several respects similar to those of Rönnow (1929), to whom he does not refer. Ruben has gone a step further and suggested that the Asūr, a tribe now living in Central India, may be traced back to older tribes with similar names that the Vedic Indians interpreted as referring to the Asuras. This might have resulted in the development from the Indo-Iranian Asuras into the demonic Asuras of later times. Unlikely, no doubt, but not impossible.

Macdonald (1952 = 1975) has placed Mus' ideas in a wider perspective by providing more ethnographic evidence from South, Southeast, East, and Central Asia. He has also emphasized that the male victim is symbolically coupled with the female earth. This is supported by early Vedic references to a sacrificial boar mating with the earth, which is consistent with the fact that Puruṣa/Prajāpati is male, like most animal victims (it is not supported by the romantic frontispiece of a girl victim in Campbell 1864). Referring to the work of Verrier Elwin, Macdonald has drawn attention to the fact that the stake to which the meriah victim was tied was forked, and that "the victim's head was sometimes pulled back across the fork" (cf. Campbell 1864, 113). According to Macdonald this form represents the female sex. He is supported, for example, by the practice of the Angami Nagas, as reported by Hutton (1921, 231-232), who "spread prosperity" by means of two stakes, one forked and one straight, "the former representing 'the reproductive organs of the woman and the other the male organ'" (Macdonald 1952, 333 = 1975, 6). It may be noted that the Vedic animal sacrifice requires single-pronged (*eka-śūla*) as well as two-pronged (*dvi-śūla*) forks.

Macdonald believes that the dismemberment myth is not, or is not merely, an agrarian rite, as Mus had suggested, but that it goes back to a

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period before the beginning of agriculture. He describes or refers to various rituals in which the animal victim is shared out among members of the community in such a way that it establishes or reestablishes the position of each member in the social hierarchy:

The animal sacrificed was doubtless originally the animal caught in the hunt. Meat, the product par excellence of the hunt, was a rare commodity for many of the members of the primitive community; that the sharing out of this asset was done unequally is not at all surprising. The strong man, the accomplished hunter, the priest on whose activities the smooth succession of the seasons depends, the maker of arms or of instruments, these will not receive the same portion as the unskilled adolescent. . . . Prajāpati is the male; the hunt is essentially the occupation, the business of the males of the community. It is the males whose ranks are fixed in these moments of coming together which are marked by communal banquets (Macdonald 1952, 335, 338 = 1975, 7,8).

If Macdonald is right this would not merely provide background for Ṛgveda 10.90.12, in which the castes are derived from parts of the primeval Puruṣa, but it would throw light on many patterns of hierarchical distribution, among the yajamāna and his priests, of offerings and oblations of parts of the animal victim, sacrificial cakes, and sacrificial beverages such as Soma. The dakṣiṇā or "sacrificial gift" is also distributed hierarchically: the four main priests (hotā, adhvaryu, brahman, udgātā) receive twice as much as the next four (maitrāvaruṇa, pratiprasthātā, brāhmaṇacchamsin, prastotā), who in turn receive twice as much as the next four (acchāvāka, neṣṭā, āgnīdhra, pratihartā), who receive twice as much as the remaining four (grāvastut, unnetā, potā, subrahmaṇya). The yajamāna defrays the cost of the ritual, which the priests perform on his behalf. In the *sattra* rituals the yajamāna has been eliminated and the priests perform the rites among themselves. In recent times, when a Soma ritual is performed, the relationship between the yajamāna and his priests is like that found in a *sattra* ritual: all are chosen from the same group of vaidikas, and the roles may be distributed differently at a subsequent performance. This is an institutionalization of the cyclical distribution of wealth, which Heesterman (1959) regarded as characteristic of the dakṣiṇā.

Malamoud (1976, 197-198) has drawn attention to another feature of dakṣiṇā: the analogy between a ritual performance and medical treatment, specifically psychoanalysis. The relationship between the yajamāna and his priests is analogous to that between a patient and his analyst. In either case, payment of dues is necessary, and without it the performance might not come to an end. As Freud emphasized, free treatment produces an increase in resistance. Similarly, without dakṣiṇā the ritual would be incomplete.

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Heesterman (1967) does not reject Rönnow's conclusions with regard to the Agnicayana and the human sacrifice that underlies it, but he places them in a different perspective. According to him there are several contradictions inherent in the śrauta rituals, to which the manuals have given various solutions. By seeking the origins of these contradictions we can partially reconstruct a "preclassical" ritual. At the beginning of the Agnicayana, for example, there is mention of the preparation of the five heads, but there are also the alternatives of the sacrifice of a he-goat for Prajāpati or for Vāyu. In the preclassical ritual, animals (including the human victim) were beheaded, but in the classical ritual, victims have to be killed by strangulation outside the sacrificial enclosure. That the animals were originally slaughtered at the time they were tied to the sacrificial post follows from expiation rites prescribed in the event blood has mistakenly been spilled on the post. Ṛgveda 1.162.9, moreover, refers to portions of flesh sticking to the post.

Possibly the peculiar way in which the animal is bound to the stake points in the same direction: the cord is fastened to the right foot, goes round the left side of the neck and is then wound round the right horn and finally fastened to the stake. Thus room is left for the slaughterer's knife (Heesterman 1962, 18).

According to Heesterman, in such cases the concern is to remove what is impure and inauspicious from the place of sacrifice (ibid., 19), and to create an ideally ordered world of rationalized sacrifice (1967, 43), impervious to death.

More specific conclusions can be drawn from the introductory rites of the Agnicayana. According to the Śrauta Sūtra of Baudhāyana, the head of the vaiśya has to be obtained in battle, in other words, it is the head of an enemy conquered in battle. When the clay for the preparation of the ukhā pot has to be obtained, a procession starts out towards the loam pit. On the way they come across an anthill with a vaiśya posted to its south to guard it. The clay they seek, in which Agni is supposed to be hidden, is referred to as *puriṣa*, a term connected with cattle (see also Gonda 1965a, 224-225). According to Heesterman, it is here that we hit "the rock bottom of reality. The vaiśya or rival does not so much guard an anthill or a loam pit, however weighty their symbolic value, but his own head, his cattle, and his fields" (1967, 40). Actually, Baudhāyana's phrase "he guards it (i.e., the anthill) from the south" (*tām dakṣiṇato gopāyann āste*) could be interpreted as: "he keeps himself south of it acting as a cowherd" (ibid. note 52a). In other words, we are back at the cattle raids and similar raiding expeditions of the Vedic nomads, referred to before (above, pages 97-105; cf. Vol. II, page 485).

The vaiśya group, whose domain is called *viś*, consists mainly of farmers and cattle breeders. In contradistinction, the kṣatriyas or rājanyas, whose domain is kṣatra, represent the military, the nobility, and the secular power.

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Mylius (1974) has drawn attention to a large number of passages in the Brāhmaṇa and ritual literature in which vaiśyas are described as the main object of exploitation: they are *ādyā*, "to be eaten." Their chief exploiters (*attr*) are kṣatriyas, assisted by brahmins. For example: "viś is food for the kṣatriyas" (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 3.3.2.8); "the state (rāṣṭra) eats the viś" (13.2.9.8); "he places the juhū ladle on top, and the other sruc ladle below, because juhū is the kṣatra and the other sruc ladles are the viś. Thus he makes kṣatra superior to viś" (1.3.4.15); "he places the Soma on the pressing stones; Soma is kṣatra and the pressing stones are viś. Thus he makes kṣatra rise above viś" (3.9.3.3.); etc.

There are also passages stating explicitly that brahmins tried to play kṣatra and viś off against each other, e.g.: "An offering on eleven potsherds for Indra and on seven potsherds for the Maruts should be made by someone who wants to create strife between viś and kṣatra" (Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā 2.1.9).

Starting from the Cosmic Man, we have found notions of human sacrifice connected with the Agnicayana. In the case of the head of the vaiśya, the killing is not sacrificial; it merely reflects the customary raids and expeditions of the Vedic nomads. It is possible that the notion of human sacrifice is inherently connected with the dismemberment of a primeval giant. Sauvé (1970) has shown that both occur together in Indian and Scandinavian mythology. But human sacrifice in Scandinavia, as described by Sauvé, is almost totally different from Vedic sacrifice. There is no compelling reason, therefore, to derive both from an Indo-European prototype. It is not surprising that Vedic scholars have been able to put Puruṣa and Prajāpati together from earlier Vedic material. This is an exercise in ingenuity, at least in part. The Vedas themselves are not isolated; it is we who happen to be ignorant of most of their context and surroundings. The relatively late appearance of the Puruṣasūkta in the R̥gveda, and the widespread occurrence of notions of human sacrifice in South and Southeast Asia, would equally support the hypothesis that the Cosmic Man is a pre-Vedic phenomenon. More likely than either of these two theories is the hypothesis that the Vedic nomads and the pre-Vedic Indians each had a notion of a Cosmic Man whose features may have been combined in the Agnicayana. At the present state of our knowledge it would be hazardous to try to derive a more definite conclusion.

The connections between the Puruṣasūkta and the Agnicayana explain the importance of the number 1,000 in the construction of the fire altar. According to the śulba sūtras, which deal specifically with altar construction, 1,000 bricks should be used for the construction of the altar at the first performance of an Agnicayana. This altar is then piled in five layers of 200 bricks each. The number five was already an important number, and the Agnicayana seems to have made it even more important. Groups of fives are widespread in the Vedas and in classical Hinduism (see, e.g., Knipe

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1972, 28–32; 1975, 1–7). The construction of the altar, however, is a topic in its own right and deserves a separate section.

THE ALTAR

BEFORE TAKING UP the construction of the large bird-shaped brick altar that is the distinguishing mark of the Agnicayana ritual, let us revert once more to the culture of the Indo-Iranian nomads before they entered the Indian subcontinent. Mary Boyce's description is suggestive:

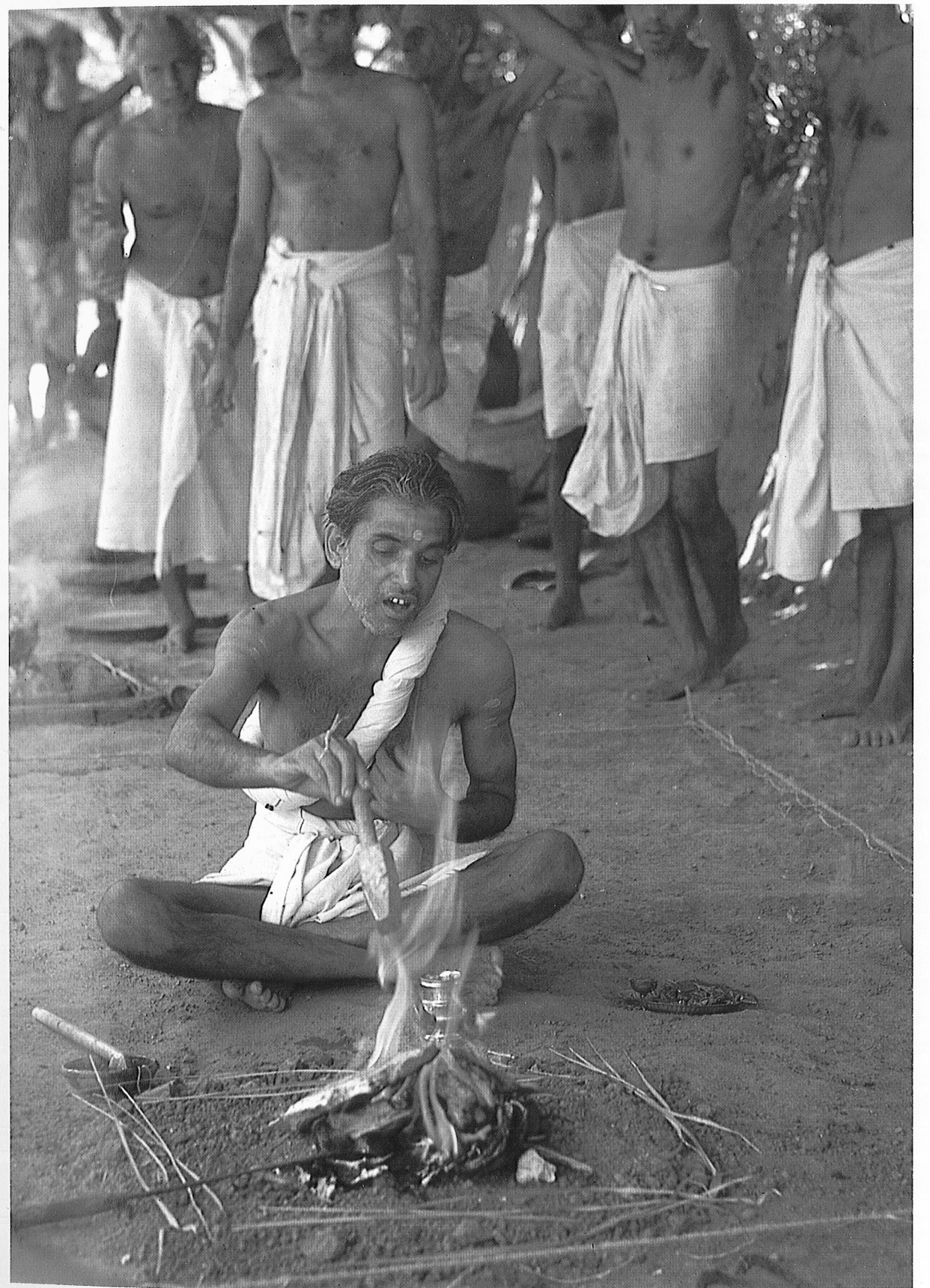
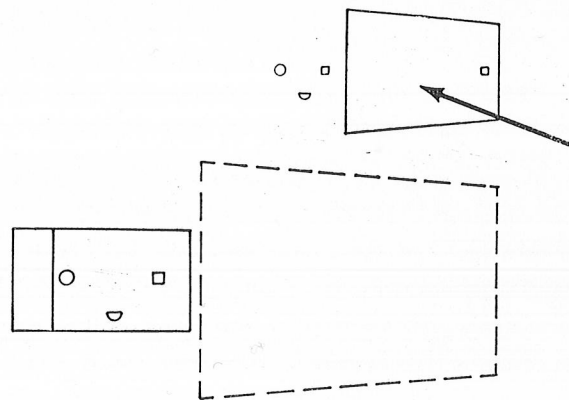
The Indo-Iranian religion was shaped, it seems, during millenia of wandering on the steppes of Inner Asia, and materially it was accordingly of extreme simplicity. Worship was offered the divine beings without aid of temples or altars or statues, and all that was needed for solemnizing the high rituals was a clean, flat piece of ground, which could be marked off by a ritually-drawn furrow. The offerings consecrated there were made not only to the invisible gods, but also to fire and water, which could properly be represented by the nearest domestic fire and household spring, although a ritual fire was always present within the precinct itself, burning in a low brazier. (The fire was placed in a low container within the ritual precinct because the celebrating priest himself sat cross-legged upon the ground.) To judge from later practice, this ritual fire was either kindled for the occasion, or made of embers brought from the nearest hearth. The only continually-burning fire known to the Indo-Iranians was evidently the hearth fire, lit when a man set up his home and kept alight as long as he himself lived, a divinity within the house. This was tended with care and received regularly a threefold offering of dry wood, incense, and fat from the sacrificial animal. Such domestic fire could readily be carried in a pot during nomadic wanderings, to continue burning wherever the family pitched its tent (Boyce 1975, 455).

Many features of this description are still applicable to the Vedic ritual. Apart from its elaborate altars, the Agnicayana includes simple rites that require oblations made into a fire installed on a simple, ritually demarcated piece of ground. An interesting question concerns the shape of these Indo-Iranian ground altars, and in particular whether they were square or round. As we have seen, the contrast between a round domestic altar and a square offering altar is found among the Vedic Indians, the Iranians, and also the Romans (above page 93). The Greeks had a round domestic altar that was generally small and on which offerings of honey and milk were

PLATE 4

The Indo-Iranian Fire Offering

Before they built alters, the Indo-Iranian nomads installed fire on a flat piece of ground, after loosening the soil and demarcating it ritually. The Agnicayana includes oblations into fires installed in this simple manner. Here the yajamāna pours butter into the fire from his juhū ladle during the animal sacrifice for Vāyu on the first day (Episode 2). The fire is the "new offering fire," installed at the eastern end of the Great Altar Space (mahāvedi). Parts of the trapezium-shaped outline of the mahāvedi are visible. The "old offering fire," burning on a clay altar, is in the background (see also Figures 3 and 22).



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made, and a square altar that was generally large and used for animal sacrifices. The roundness of the domestic altar has been related to the womb. The circular altar represented permanence, immutability, and the home. Itself unmoving, it was considered the principle of movement (Vernant 1965, 99, 122, 142–143), like Aristotle's god, "the first unmoved mover" (*τὸ πρῶτον κινῶν ἀκίνητον*).

The Greek domestic altar was often tended by women, and was sacred to a goddess, Hestia (*ἑστία*, "hearth"). The square altar, which is also the blacksmith's hearth, is related to the male god Hephaistos, originally a fire daemon from Asia Minor. In the Vedic ritual, the round domestic altar is also compared to a womb, while the square sacrificial altar represents the newly created world for the gods. All these facts seem connected, and admit of a generalization. While round and square—as the shapes of altars, temples, houses, and cities—are found separately or in various combinations throughout the world (see, e.g., Seidenberg, forthcoming), the specific contrast between round and square altars is in all likelihood Indo-European.

The burial mounds (*śmaśāna*) of Vedic times could be either square or round (Caland 1896, 141). Square seems to have been the preferred shape. According to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (13.8.1.5; cf. 13.8.2.1), the burial mounds of the godly people (*daivyaḥ prajāḥ*) are four cornered (*catuḥ-srakti*), whereas those of "Asuras, easterners, and others" are round (*parimaṇḍala*). Thus the square or quadrangle seems to be the Vedic shape, the round one that of the original inhabitants. It has been suggested that the circular, "native" shape survives in the round stūpas of Buddhism, which are burial mounds in so far as they contain relics. The Vedic preference for the square burial might be related to the Vedic nomads Central-Asian background. Even in northern Asia, where the corpse is placed on a platform, the platform is square or at least rectangular. Among Altaic peoples, who perform a horse sacrifice, the bones of the horse are placed on a square platform (Nachtigall 1953, 54). Elsewhere we find a mixture of square and circular burial pits (as among the Lepchas in Sikkim: Nebesky de Wojkowitz 1951, 31). But all of this should merely alert us that such parallels may not be taken too seriously.

The main altar of the Agnicayana functions in several respects as a tomb: the golden man and five heads of sacrificial victims are buried under it. In the Agnicayana altar, the square definitely prevails over the circle. The bricks are square or have shapes derived from the square, such as rectangles and triangles (see Figure 9 on page 198). It is possible that an echo of round bricks survives in the so-called *maṇḍaleṣṭakās*, "circle bricks," but these are generally taken to be bricks on which a circle is carved or drawn. In the 1975 performance, they occurred in the first, third, and fifth layer, on top of each other. Circles made up of squares occur in the Agnicayana altar in two ways. In the central part of the first, third, and fifth layer of the bird-shaped altar, the bricks may be arranged in the shape of a circle. This is described in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (for illustrations see Eggeling 1897, IV, 17, 48, and 98).

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Or else, as a special form, the entire altar may be built in the shape of a chariot's wheel (*rathacakra*; for illustrations see van Gelder 1963, 311, 313). As we shall see, the altar may also be constructed in the shape of a "square" bird (*piṭhan*) (see Volume II, pages 351–357).

The predominance of the square in the main altar of the Agnicayana derives from the squareness of the offering altar. Roundness is the mark of the domestic altar. It seems contradictory that in the Agnicayana the new domestic altar is constructed in the shape of square, but this is not difficult to explain. In the more complex śrauta rituals, the domestic sphere has receded further into the background. The higher we ascend in the hierarchy of rituals, the more predominant become śrauta features and the more recessive grhya features. The new domestic altar of the Agnicayana, following this trend, has become a square.

It is clear that it would be incorrect to say that the Vedic nomads had only square altars. They considered the square more sacred and made it the shape of their offering and divine altar. Their circular domestic altar, however, exhibited the basic shape. This is in accordance with the data from other Indo-European cultures, and is obvious from the ritual. For example, the fire for the square offering altar is lit from the circular domestic altar. The pre-Vedic Indians may have had circular altars, in which case the Vedic nomads scored two points at the same time when they began to construct their new domestic altar in the shape of a square: on the one hand they moved further into the divine sphere, on the other hand they put the indigenous inhabitants further down. Such double-edged moves are quite consistent with the general character of Vedic ritual.

In the Ṛgveda, three altars are mentioned, but the shape of an altar is mentioned only once, and indirectly. Ṛgveda 10.114.3 is a riddle that mentions a girl with four tufts (*catuṣkaparda*) who is butter-faced (*ghṛtapratika*). The mention of butter makes it clear that a fire is referred to (cf. Ṛgveda 5.11.1, above page 74), and the riddle implies that the altar on which this fire was installed was quadrangular (cf. Potdar 1953, 73). That the Ṛgveda does not explicitly refer to round altars can of course not be construed as an argument that there were no such altars in the Ṛgvedic period. In view of the later development it is more likely that it was understood that the domestic altar was circular.

Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 13.8.2.1 is another passage that contrasts the burial mounds of the Vedic nomads with those of the original inhabitants. It states that the former are close to the ground, while the latter are separated from the ground "on a *camū* or some such thing." Eggeling takes *camū* to be "a shallow stone basis or trough, either solid or consisting of masonry (bricks) in the manner of our stone-lined graves" (1900, V, 430, note 1). However, the term *camū* generally denotes a vessel or pot. It seems more likely that this *camū* was used as a coffin, in which case the reference is to urn burials. Pre-historic urn burials have been found in several parts of the Indian subconti-

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nent (see, e.g., Longhurst 1936, 9–10 and Figure 8). Since the Vedic funeral involved cremation, there was an area on which the fire was installed. If this is the place specifically described as close to the ground, it would seem that the Vedic nomads had not reached that stage of development at which fire is installed at some height so as to benefit from draughts. This further corroborates the picture of the Indo-Iranian altar as simply a demarcated piece of soil.

There is a very wide gap between the simple altars of the Indo-Iranians and of the Ṛgveda, and those described in the Yajurveda. The texts of the Yajurveda describe the altar for the Agnicayana as an enormous structure piled up from at least a thousand kiln-fired bricks. The term used to denote bricks, *iṣṭakā* or *iṣṭikā*, occurs for the first time in the Taittirīya Saṃhitā, and is subsequently found in the other branches and texts of the Yajurveda. In these texts we also find elaborate references to the firing of the *ukhā* pot, which itself is not mentioned in any earlier text. Taittirīya Saṃhitā 4.1.6 provides the mantras that accompany the rites at which the pot is moulded from clay and smoked, after which a trench is dug, the pot is placed in it, covered with fire, and baked for three days. All these things are done, according to the mantras, “in the manner of Aṅgiras” (*aṅgirasvat*). Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra 10.6 (see Volume II, page 495) states that a second and third *ukhā* pot (obviously spares), five bricks called *ṛṣabha* (“bull”), and three bricks called *maṇḍale-ṣṭakā* (the bricks already referred to, which have a circle carved or drawn on their surface) are to be treated in the same manner. The terms *dhūpayate* (“fumigate”) and *sudhūpita* (“well fumigated”) occur in this context for the first time. The verb used for “firing,” *pacati*, is common from the Ṛgveda onwards for cooking, baking, roasting, or boiling, but is used for the first time in these Yajurvedic contexts for the baking of bricks. The technical sense of “fumigating” is not clear, unless it refers to reduction (cf. Saraswati and Behura, 1966, 128–129).

In an important article, Converse (1974) has argued for the indigenous origin of the Agnicayana construction, because the art of baking bricks, which was unknown to the Vedic nomads, was practiced by the much earlier Harappans:

The Harappans used millions of kiln-fired bricks as well as countless sun-baked ones. . . . The bricks of the Harappa civilization in its mature phase were beautifully made, well fired, and standardized in size. The basic size for the bricks was 11 1/2 inches long, 5 3/4 inches wide, and two or three inches thick. There were also double bricks 11 inches square, and special bricks for well copings, drain covers, corners, etc.

Now, in the whole of the Ṛg-Veda there is no word for brick, nor any descriptive phrase for bricks. So far no ruins of brick dwellings have been found that can be attributed to the Aryans in

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the early Ṛg-Vedic period. The Ṛg-Vedic references to houses indicate that they were made of perishable wood and thatch. Bricks were thus not part of the Ṛg-Vedic technical or ritual accomplishments. There are also no references to bricks in the Ṛg-Veda Brāhmaṇas and outside of the Agnicayana sections of the Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas of the Yajurveda tradition, no significant references to bricks occur in these or in the Sāmaveda Brāhmaṇas. Thus, in the Brāhmaṇas, when references to bricks begin to appear, their use is confined to one specialized rite, and the rite itself is found only in the Yajurveda tradition. The fire altars in other rites were made of packed earth, not bricks.

The size of the bricks to be used in the rite was one foot square, and half-bricks were also to be used (ŚB vii, 5,3,2; viii, 7,2,17). This size and shape corresponds very closely to that of the Harappa bricks described above. The lack of any bricks in the early Vedic tradition and the presence of bricks in large numbers and of the same size in the adjacent indigenous Black-and-Red Ware territory suggest that the Black-and-Red Ware culture is the source of the Agnicayana brick-making skills.

The word for brick also suggests a probably non-Aryan origin. As a Sanskrit word, *iṣṭakā* is related to the ritual use of bricks as an oblation, an *iṣṭi*, and not to their general character as a building material. This suggests that bricks first came into Vedic usage through this ritual function, rather than through their usual building function. By contrast, the brick words in Dravidian-based languages such as Tamil are descriptive of the primary use for bricks for building. For instance, one Tamil word for brick is *cengal*; *cennu* means straightness, and *kal* or *gal* means stone or clay. Another Tamil word for burnt (fired) brick is *cuṭakal*, *suṭakal*; again *kal* means clay or stone, and *cuṭu*, *suṭu* means to burn, to bake, to burn bricks. It is possible that an early form of *suṭakal* was the foreign phonetic basis of what becomes Sanskritized into *iṣṭakā*: an inversion (not uncommon in the incorporation of Dravidian words into Sanskrit) of the *s* and the *u*, and the dropping of the final *l* to conform to Sanskrit endings, would give *uṣṭaka*; the use of the bricks as *iṣṭi* would tend to bring about the change from the initial *u* (not common in Sanskrit) to the more common *i*. Whatever the source word, it was the Sanskrit meaning of the approximate transliteration of the indigenous word that was emphasized, and this Sanskrit word, *iṣṭakā*, in no way reflects the building function of bricks but only their ritual use (Converse 1974, 83–85).

Converse's archaeological arguments are strong. It has to be noted, however, that the size of the bricks, though perhaps in practice having sides

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of more or less a half foot, a foot, or one and a half feet long, was not an absolute measure, but relative to the size of the sacrificer. This is clear from the sūtra literature, and mentioned in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (10.2.2.6): "He measures the altar by the sacrificer with upstretched arms".

Converse's linguistic arguments are less strong than her archaeological evidence, and require some comment. A Dravidian origin for *iṣṭakā* is improbable or impossible on etymological grounds (Emeneau, personal communication; Emeneau also points out that *ceṇ-kallu* means "red stone"). Moreover, *iṣṭakā* is not merely Indian, but also Indo-Iranian. Mayrhofer's *Etymological Dictionary* gives the Iranian cognate *ištya* with the same meaning, "brick." This term is attested only twice (Martin Schwartz, personal communication): both occurrences are in the *Videvdād* (*Vendidad*), 8.8 and 8.10, a late Avestan text, not earlier than the third century B.C. In both contexts, bricks or the dust from bricks or stones are used to cover a corpse, not for the construction of a burial mound, but to protect the corpse temporarily, in bad weather, before it is given to the birds and other animals. In Old Persian too *išti* occurs and means "brick" (allegedly fire dried). It is found, for example, in an inscription by Darius from Susa (fragment 29). It refers to the bricks used for the construction of Darius' palace. The inscription informs us that Babylonians were employed as brick makers. In modern Persian, derivatives from the same stem are also common.

In Iranian, then, the term for "brick" is used in a general sense, and is not confined to altar building, or similarly constrained to sacred usage. This does not invalidate Converse's view that *iṣṭakā* in the Yajurveda texts refers only to ritual bricks. In Vedic culture, bricks were never used in the construction of ordinary buildings: *l'emploi en est limité à l'empilement de l'autel du feu (agnicayana)—et accessoirement des dhiṣṇya (foyers) annexes* (Renou 1939, 504, note 1). In Indian architecture (*vāstuvidyā*), bricks appear only much later (Bhattacharyya 1948, 249–258).

The term used for "brick" could have been taken by the Indians from the Iranians, or by the Iranians from the Indians, or by both from an earlier source. It is possible to derive it from an Indo-Iranian root, but this is open to doubt. The term *iṣṭi*, denoting the ritual oblation of a vegetable substance and the accompanying rites (see above pages 46–48), is derived from the root *yaj-*, "sacrifice, perform a rite," with past passive participle *iṣṭa*, "sacrificed." Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 6.2.1.10 adopts this etymology for *iṣṭakā*: "Inasmuch as he saw them having sacrificed (*iṣṭvā*) they are called bricks (*iṣṭakā*)."

The root *iṣ-*, "desire," also has a past passive participle *iṣṭa*, "desired, liked, agreeable." So *iṣṭakā* might alternatively be derived from *iṣ-*, "desire," in which case it could denote a wished-for object, for example, a "wish stone" (like our "wishbone"). This is in accordance with an important feature of the bricks of the Agnicayana: as soon as the altar is completed, the yajamāna wishes the bricks to turn into cows, saying: "Agni, may these bricks be cows

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for me" (*me agna iṣṭakā dhenavaḥ santu*: Taittirīya Saṃhitā 4.4.11.3p.) If this was felt to be the main import of the bricks, they would be called *iṣṭakā*, because they were wish fulfillers. This is related to a common theme in Vedic and in Hinduism, where Kāmadhenu, "Cow of Plenty," satisfies all desires. The yajamāna's recitation of the Taittirīya Saṃhitā ends: "Agni, may these bricks be cows for me, glorious, giving the milk of desire beyond in the other world." Whatever its interpretation, *iṣṭakā* does not always refer to bricks, for example, in Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra X (sections 27, 29, 31, 34, 39) it applies to a piece of gold (*hiranyeṣṭakā*), a pot (*kumbheṣṭakā*), and all kinds of pebbles. All we can say for the present is that the term *iṣṭakā* suggests an Indo-Iranian, not a Dravidian background.

The term *iṣṭakā* survives in modern India in the meaning "(kiln-fired) brick," and is connected with immortality in a manner curiously reminiscent of the Agnicayana. Here is a Hindi riddle: "It was born right in the water, but seeing the water it dies. Brothers, let's go and cremate it; then it will be immortal (*jal hi me paidā bhāi jalai dekh mar jāi; caliyo panco phūk dē pher amar ho jāi*). The solution is: *iṭ*, "brick." Dundes and Vatuk (1974, 128–130) explain this as follows:

Brick making in India begins with taking mud out of a village pond. The mud is placed in a hollow rectangular wooden frame. After smoothing the top, the frame is removed and the brick-to-be is left to dry in the sun. Village homes are typically made of such sun-dried brick. Unfortunately, if rain falls on such a brick, it will dissolve. Thus, though the brick is "born in water," it may die upon coming into contact with water again. There is, however, a way of preventing this catastrophe. By "cremating," or baking the mud brick one renders it resistant to water and thus immortal. The suggestion that cremation ensures immortality is contrary to general eschatological theory inasmuch as everyone who dies becomes immortal. There is thus a philosophical contradiction in the second portion of the riddle statement. And even empirically there is a contradiction between an object's being cremated and thus utterly destroyed and that object's being made "immortal" in the sense of existing and withstanding destructive forces.

Converse has drawn attention to a special feature of the firing of the *ukhā* pot, which also applies to the mahāvīra vessel of the Pravargya: both are fired with the bottom turned up. This detail is referred to by Eggeling between brackets in his translation of Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 6.5.4.4: "He then sets down the fire pan (with the bottom part upwards)." This information is not contained in the original, which merely says: "he sets down the *ukhā*" (*ukhām avadadhāti*). Eggeling has probably taken this extra informa-

PLATE 5A
The Ukā Pot

PLATE 5B
The Mahāvira Pot



A



B

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tion from Kātyāyana Śrauta Sūtra 16.4.11, which states that the adhvaryu sets down the ukhā pot "upside down" (*nyubjām*). As for the mahāvīra pot and the Pravargya, Converse refers to Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 14.1.2.21, which, without entering into details, implies that the ukhā and mahāvīra pots are to be treated similarly. Kashikar, in a study on Vedic pottery, supports this: "Even though the size and shape of this cauldron (*ukhā*) are different, the procedure of preparing it is mostly identical with that prescribed in connexion with the preparation of the mahāvīra" (Kashikar 1969, 19). This similarity has been further explored by Ikari (1975, and Vol. II, pages 168–177) and fits in well with the relationships between the Agnicayana and the Pravargya noted by Rönnow and others (see above pages 183–184).

Converse comments on the "upside down":

This may seem like an insignificant detail. But it was specifically this inverted firing technique by which the Black-and-Red Ware, the distinctive trait of the indigenous non-Vedic culture, was made black and red! The technique was not used in the making of the Gray Ware, except very sparsely at very late levels. Inverting the pot during firing limits the oxidation in the interior of the pot, and this partial reduction leaves the interior black, while the outside fires to a red color because of the full reduction of the clays and washes used (1974, 85).

Converse has drawn attention to another passage that also suggests a pre-Vedic origin for the ukhā pot: Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 6.6.2.6 (misprinted as "7" on Converse's page 86) quotes a mantra with which this cauldron is addressed, and that Eggeling translated as: "An Asura contrivance thou art, made in the wonted manner." Converse comments:

The reference to the pot as an "Asura contrivance" and to the inverted firing technique as the Asuras' wonted or habitual manner of making pots acknowledges that the making of the pot has been taken over from the enemy indigenous tradition. Thus the text independently corroborates the archaeological evidence that the Black-and-Red Ware technique was identified with the non-Vedic indigenous culture. And this in turn underlines the close connection of the Agnicayana rite with that culture (1974, 86).

These conclusions seem valid though the original text does not entirely back up Eggeling's translation. The mantra quoted in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa occurs in Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā 11.69 and similarly in Taittirīya Saṃhitā 4.1.9.2 d and in the other Saṃhitās of the Yajurveda. It says: "You are an Asuric trick (*māyā*), made by self-power (*sva-dhayā*)" (*āsuri māyā sva-dhayā kṛtā'si*; Keith translates: "Thou are the wile of the Asura, made

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with power"). The magical force of *māyā* is indeed, from the Ṛgveda onwards, associated with the Asuras. It is true that *svadhā* can mean: "habitual state" or "custom." But the reference in this context is more likely to be to the idea that the ukhā pot is a spontaneous product that comes into being through its own power, just as the fire alights in it without being lit.

The basic conclusion of Converse stands unaffected: the ukhā pot is of Asuric origin. Taken together with the assumption that references to Asuras are often references to the original inhabitants, the ukhā pot must have an indigenous origin. This may apply to the mahāvīra pot as well. However, the non-Vedic character of the Pravargya ceremony should not be stressed too far. The hot milk offering (*gharma*) of the Pravargya, for example, has clearly Ṛgvedic origins. The term *gharma* itself does not, in the Ṛgveda, mean merely "heat," as has been often assumed. Velankar has enumerated fifteen Ṛgvedic verses in which *gharma* is used in the technical sense of "hot milk offering" (Velankar 1962, 228–237). Six of these verses occur in Aśvin hymns, which is in accordance with the fact that the *gharma* offering of the Pravargya is dedicated to the Aśvin twins. In the Pravargya, this hot milk is also connected with *tapas*, "heat," and with sexual excitation, a phenomenon not restricted to either Vedic or pre-Vedic India (cf. van Buitenen 1968, 37; Kaelber 1976, 348–349).

If Rönnow, Ruben, and others correctly assumed that references to Asuras often indicate indigenous, pre-Vedic practices and beliefs, the same appears to hold for the Aṅgirasas. In the Brāhmaṇas, the Aṅgirasas are often contrasted with the Ādityas, the golden sons of Aditi, who assist man in his struggle for freedom. The Aṅgirasas stand in a similar relationship to the Ādityas as the Asuras do to the gods (Hillebrandt 1927, 181). Hillebrandt was the first to draw attention to the numerous references to Aṅgiras in the Agnicayana ritual (Hillebrandt 1927, 175–176). As we have seen, the preparation of the ukhā pot takes place in different stages, each of which is gone through "in the manner of Aṅgiras" (cf. Renou 1953, 18).

Who were these Aṅgirasas, after whom Agni is frequently called "Aṅgiras" and "first Aṅgiras?" Hillebrandt concluded from a general survey of their occurrence in the Ṛgveda that "the Aṅgirasas were originally a family which was rather outside the main Vedic tradition, as shown by their lack of prominence in books ii–ix" (Keith 1925, I, 224). Following this suggestion there has been a great deal of scholarly discussion on their identity and provenance, and on the possible etymologies of their name. Earlier, Macdonnell had defended the view that the Aṅgirasas were intermediaries between gods and men, and that their name is related to Greek ἀγγελος, "messenger," English: angel. Evidence for their intermediary status, however, is slight, and this view has been generally rejected. More recently, the possibility of this etymology was revived by H.W. Bailey (1957, 52–53), who postulated a root **aṅg*, "sing, enunciate," which occurs in the Vedic word *aṅgūṣa*, "song of praise." But Schmidt (1968, 51–52) has pointed out that

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there are several problems in the derivation of *aṅgiras* from such a root (including the fact that a suffix *-iras* is not known anywhere else).

Outside of language, etymologies prove little, "for usage is stronger than etymology" (*yogād rūdher baliyastvāt*, as the Mīmāṃsā philosophers have it). Even if a word is Indo-European, like *Asura*, for example, it might refer to things Indian and pre-Vedic. It is possible that the *Aṅgiras*es were singers, and reasonably certain that they were priests of a fire cult. They are directly related to the *Asuras* in Ṛgveda 3.53.7 and 10.67.2, where the *Aṅgiras*es are called "heroes of *Asura*" (*asurasya virāḥ*). Following Hillebrandt, it would not be farfetched to suppose that the *Aṅgiras*es were originally an indigenous tribe or family that was incorporated into the Vedic cult at a relatively early stage. It is conceivable that the Agnicayana was incorporated into the Vedic ritual through their intermediary, since they were primarily priests of a fire cult. Thus the theory of Kosambi (1950), criticized in Brough (1953, xiv-xvi), that the Vedic brahmins were to a large extent recruited from the priest class of the conquered pre-Aryan population, would seem to be valid at least in the case of the *Aṅgiras*es.

In conclusion, available evidence suggests that the altar construction of the Agnicayana, and also the *ukhā* and *mahāvīra* pots—chief ritual vessels of the Agnicayana and the Pravargya, respectively—are of pre-Vedic origin, and should be explained by the techniques for firing bricks and pots that were known to the indigenous population, and that can ultimately be traced back to the Indus Civilization. Within a wider context, this is not surprising. The use of baked bricks, though not confined to the Indus Civilization, was one of its characteristic achievements. Baked bricks were used in Sumer, though not abundantly. In Mohenjo-daro and Harappā, the use of baked bricks, rather than of mud bricks, was normal (Wheeler 1968, 8, 55). Whatever the explanation of its early distribution, it is likely that the art of firing bricks was retained by the inhabitants of Northwest India even after the great Indus cities had disappeared. In Iran, the Indo-Iranian nomadic invaders also inherited the art from earlier, sedentary civilizations. Darius employed Babylonians as his brick makers, and, as Professor Schwartz informs me, the Iranian term for oven, *tanūra*, is of Mesopotamian origin. This Mesopotamian term survives to the present day in "chicken-tandoori."

Though the altar of the Agnicayana has not been incorporated in Hinduism, there are later Indian cults that make use of fire altars. These cults are characterized by *homa*, the act of offering an oblation (generally of ghee = *ghṛta*, "clarified butter") into the fire (cf. *hotā*: above page 89). Though there is hardly any literature on it, the *homa* cult is found in both temples and practised by wandering *saṃnyāsins* and *yogins*. It has been incorporated into Buddhism, and has taken root in Tibet, China, and Japan. In the cult of the Japanese Shingon and Tendai orders, fire altars play a preponderant role. These will be treated by Michel Strickmann in volume II (pages 418–455). There is a long gap between these cults and the Vedic fire altar, and not much

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is known about the historical development. That Vedic elements survive is clear. Not only is the Shingon fire ceremony called *goma*, but the number of fire sticks (*samidh*) is twenty-one, as in the *Puruṣa-sūkta* (Ṛgveda 10.90.15: above page 115).

NATURALLY PERFORATED STONES

QUIBBLES ASIDE, CONVERSE'S demonstration has established beyond reasonable doubt that the construction of the two main altars of the Agnicayana from fired bricks must be traced back to the earlier civilization of the Indus Valley. This does not imply that the entire Agnicayana ritual is a Harappan ritual, nor is it the end of the story as far as the altar itself is concerned. The piling of bricks has many other specific features. The bricks are put down in a particular order, they have particular names, and they are consecrated with particular mantras. These particular features are basically the same in the various recensions of the Yajurveda, and must therefore be ancient (Weber 1873, 270).

Among the bricks, there are two kinds that deserve special mention. These are the *apasyāḥ* "water (bricks)" and the *svayamātṛṇṇāḥ*, "naturally perforated (bricks)." The *apasya* bricks are put down close to the heads of the animals, and it is said that thereby water is put into these victims (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 7.5.2.40; the positions adopted in 1975 were not the same, as we shall see, pages 437–438). Baudhāyana uses the term *apasya* to refer to certain pebbles or stones that Kātyāyana calls *parīśrit*, "encloser," and that are elsewhere called *śarkara*. Such pebbles are used to mark or demarcate the enclosures of altars. They occur in most rituals beginning with the installation of the fire (*Agnyādhāna*), in the Agnicayana itself (see below pages 339, 387) and also in the funerary rites, where they demarcate the *śmaśāna* burial mounds (Caland 1896, 145). It is possible that the bricks called after these pebbles are remnants of an earlier and less elaborate method of demarcating altars. Such methods were probably used by the Vedic nomads and by the Indo-Iranian nomads before they entered the subcontinent. Confining fire to a hearth by means of pebbles or stones is more or less universal.

Such a nomadic Vedic origin may also be assumed for the three *svayamātṛṇṇā*, "naturally perforated ones," though on different grounds. A Vedic origin would explain the extraordinary importance attached to these bricks, which are sometimes treated as pebbles, and which are generally shrouded in mystery. According to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, three *svayamātṛṇṇā* should occupy the center of the first, third, and fifth layers of the altar. They represent the three worlds, earth (*prthivī*, *bhū*), air (*antarikṣam*, *bhuvā*), and sky (*dyaus*, *sva*). They permit the golden man, and thereby the sacrificer, to breath and to pass to the highest regions (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 6.1.2.31 sq; 6.2.3.1 sq; etc.). If a person who has already performed the

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Agnicayana once wishes to perform another Soma ritual, but is not in a position to repeat the entire Agnicayana ceremony, it is sufficient for him to put down the three svayamātrṇṇā: "He need only lay down the naturally perforated ones; for the naturally perforated ones are these worlds; and this built fire altar is the same as these worlds" (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 9.5.1.58). Thus the svayamātrṇṇā represent the Agnicayana itself.

Though the svayamātrṇṇā are sometimes regarded as iṣṭakā (which need not mean "brick," as we have seen), the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (8.7.3.20; 8.7.4.1) specifically states that they are pebbles or stones (apasya; śarkara; also *suṣkāḥ śarkarāḥ* "dry stones"). A commentator on the Vājasaneyi Samhitā explains svayamatrṇṇā as "a pierced stone, transversely pierced" (*śarkarām chidrām chidrayuktām tiryakchidrām*; quoted in Weber 1873, 249, note 4). The svayamātrṇṇā were apparently called "naturally perforated" or "perforated by themselves" (*svayam*) because they were not artifacts but were found in nature. They were therefore independent of the brick-making activity that characterized the rest of the altar construction. In fact, they contrast in their naturalness with the artificial techniques of making bricks. This points to their non-Indian, i.e., Vedic origin.

It may be mentioned in passing that the svayamātrṇṇā stones are the only important stones that play a role in Vedic ritual. The grāvāṇaḥ of the Soma rituals, which are generally called "pressing stones," and are used for extracting the juice from the Soma stalks, need not be stones, but are sometimes the mortar and pestle (*ulūkhala*) and sometimes wooden (*vanaspati*) (Oliphant 1920, 230–231).

Coomaraswamy, in one of his suggestive and speculative articles (1939), has related the svayamātrṇṇā to a great variety of religious phenomena all over the world. All these express an ascent to heaven (*Himmelfahrt*). The passage of the sacrificer or golden man through the perforated stones and through the three worlds is related to the ritual climbing of a tree, a sacrificial pole, or the axis mundi, at the top of which is the gate to heaven (*janua coeli*). Such notions are found all over the world. They occur elsewhere in the Vedic ritual. In a Siberian rite, the Shaman climbs a birch tree placed within a yurt, sloping so as to leave space for the hearth, and with its crown rising above the smoke hole: this opening is "a hole through which it is possible to pass from one world to another" (Coomaraswamy 1939, 13). In a final comparison, Coomaraswamy relates Rgveda 4.6.2 (where Agni fixes his rays, as if setting up a pole, sending up smoke, and supporting heaven) to "Paleolithic man, who already possessed his circular hut with central hearth and a hole in the roof for the escape of smoke."

These speculations support the hypothesis that the idea of reaching a higher world by passing through natural holes, passages, and caves was brought by the Indo-Iranian nomads from Central Asia. Though Coomaraswamy's speculations appear farfetched, and I for one have long been sceptical, there is in fact a wealth of evidence in support of such a view. Some lin-

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guistic evidence, inconclusive but suggestive, may be mentioned first. The term śarkara, "grit, pebbles, gravel," is probably of pre-Indo-European, in fact Caucasian, origin (Hubschmidt, quoted in Mayrhofer's Etymological Dictionary). This term is also related to Arabic *sukkar* (whence English "sugar") and Latin *calculus*, a small stone used for calculation with the help of an abacus.

In Siberian Shamanism, stones with holes in them are used in a variety of contexts. They are miniature representations of rocks with caves, through which the Shaman enters the other world (Eliade 1964, 202). The Yakut Shamans wear a symbol of the "Opening of the Earth," called "Hole of the Spirits" (*abassy-oibono*; Eliade 234). The gods descend to earth through the same hole through which the Shamans fly up in ecstasy (Eliade 259). Perforated stones, some used as beads, others of uncertain use, have been found all over Inner Asia. Here are two examples brought back by Aurel Stein:

N.xiv, iii.0035. Circular ornament of dark paste inlay. Flat on back, and pierced with a hole. Front, from which outer shell is peeling, ornamented with six yellow radial stripes, divided by two thin radial lines. Between stripes, on dark ground, yellow circles surrounding black disks on which six-rayed yellow stars with red centres. Pendant or button. Fine work. 1" × 3/8". Pl. XXIX (Stein 1921, I, 252).

D.K.01. Stone bead, echinus shape, faceted, and pierced with large hole. Black stone (?) jet. Well preserved. Diam. 1/2", depth 3/8". Pl. X. (Stein 1928, I, 133).

Nothing is known about the use of these stones, but their special character could point to a ritual or magical use. Their possible use as beads probably derives from this. Nothing is known about their age, but similar stones that are almost certainly prehistoric have been found in Tibet. These stones, called *gzi*, are highly valued and auspicious. They have complicated patterns of streaks and "eyes" (*mig*) on them (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1952). They can be used as beads because they almost always have holes in them. Tibetans never make holes in them, because the stones are considered too hard. The few that are found without holes are therefore not worn as beads, but are kept separately (Lama Kunga Losang, personal communication). There are also parallels from further east that suggest that such perforated stones, and the ideas surrounding them, are in fact ancient.

The Chinese have long been interested in perforated stones, which are miniature representations of rocks with caves, and in particular of the World Mountain. These stones are sometimes placed in miniature gardens that exhibit the same general correspondence between micro- and macrocosm. The sacred mountains are regarded as the abodes of spirits, presided over by a great deity who can be approached through caves and tunnels. At the same time, the perforated stones are models of the celestial palaces of the gods.

PLATE 6
Chicken-Fish Pebbles

These pebbles were found in the Bharata Puzha (bhārata-puḷa) or Ponnani river at Kaṇṇanur, about one-and-a-half miles downstream from Pattambi. They are called kōlippiṛal, "chicken-fish," in Malayalam. Some have holes in them and count as "naturally perforated" (svayamātrṇṇā). The Agnicayana requires two pebbles with (at least) three holes, and one with (at least) five holes. If no pebbles can be found with fully perforated holes, dents or small depressions are acceptable.

These pebbles are composed of Vivianite, a scarce mineral named after the British mineralogist J.G.Vivian, who discovered it in Cornwall. It is an iron phosphate hydrate, $\text{Fe}_3(\text{PO}_4) \cdot 8\text{H}_2\text{O}$, often found in beds of clay or in cavities in altered fossils. The pebbles have an earthy, buff color, due to weathering of the surface, but the mineral inside is blue black. It occurs as spherical to irregular concretions with prismatic crystals in radiating groups. Scale in centimeters.

Photo Michael Beaucage



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Their holes correspond to the stars. The expression used in this connection is "cave-heaven" or "grottoed heaven": *tung t'ien* 洞天, which also means "fairyland," "paradise."

These Chinese rock caves or palaces are conceived of as underground areas where the immortals dwell, and that are connected with other similar places through a network of caves and tunnels. The caves are connected with the subterraneous waters and also with the lights of heaven. They serve as retreats for hermits who meditate there or use them for initiation rites. Hermits also have the power to recreate these worlds in the miniature cosmos of gardens with rocks. The stones found in nature, which have the required characteristics, may have been eroded limestones, lava, or fossiliferous rocks (for further details see Soymié 1954; Stein 1942; Schafer 1961).

In Taoism, rocks have long been regarded as symbols of longevity. While the magico-religious background of the miniature rock caves and perforated stones has been mainly developed in Taoism, it acquired in later times an esthetic dimension. According to Schafer, "the creation of a miniature mountain in a garden goes back to the early part of the Six Dynasties period, probably even to the Han" (1961, 5). In T'ang times, collecting fantastic stones was a favorite pastime for cultured gentlemen, who rivalled with each other in setting up lapidaria, and became the first connoisseurs of stones.

This not uncommon craze spread to the highest in the land. The last of the Northern Sung sovereigns, Hui Tsung, was a notorious petromaniac. His greatest single collecting effort was related to the construction of a magic mountain to the northeast of the imperial palace at K'ai-feng, at the urging of a geomancer. The completion of this monumental undertaking required several years, having been begun in A.D. 1117. To it were brought stones of wonderful shape from all parts of the realm, especially those of the Grand Lake and of Ling-pi (Schafer 1961, 8).

Many of these weird and rare stones were perforated and "riddled with holes." Schafer enumerates some of them in his translation of a Stone Catalogue compiled by Tu Wan in the twelfth century A.D. Here we find such entries as:

49. *Heart-pierced Stones* (in river at Hsiang-chou, N. Hupeh). Little blue-black pebbles, each with a hole, hence the name. The natives grope for them in the river bed each spring, as a way of divining the number of sons they will have. Recently my brother found one as large as a goose egg. It was blue, with two lines of white markings, suggesting cursive script done in ceruse. He was robbed of it by a young aristocrat. No other like it has been found (Schafer 1961, 72).

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The importance the Chinese attached to perforated stones and rocks as well as cavernous mountains is abundantly illustrated in painting. Sometimes perforated rocks appear in isolation; more often they dot the landscape (Plate 7A). A sage frequently appears in front of such a rock (Plate 7B); at other times a Buddha is seated within it (Plate 8A; also reproduced in Hu, 1977, Plate 041-25, together with several similar paintings). There are also pictures of stones riddled with holes, which belong to a collection (Plate 8B). In one painting a cavernous rock appears on the waters like a supernatural apparition (Plate 9). Even at present, the Chinese preserve rocks with holes in gardens and other special places (Plates 10A-B).

The facts we have mentioned are all clearly connected, and a general picture emerges. Since ancient times the belief was held in Central Asia that caves are the abodes of spirits. Whether this can be traced back to the time that men were cave dwellers themselves can only be guessed. In Central Asia, speculations on the correspondences between micro- and macrocosm led to the importance of perforated stones, which are miniature representations of these cavernous rocks, and which were used for magical and ritual purposes, possibly connected with divination. Many such practices and beliefs survive in Shamanism. These ideas were introduced into China at an early period, and were mainly developed in Taoist circles. From the T'ang period onward, they acquired an esthetic dimension that survives to the present day in the rock gardens of the Orient.

The Indo-Europeans shared some of the Central Asiatic beliefs about perforated stones. The Indo-Iranians imported them into the Indian subcontinent. The Indo-Iranians were also engaged in a fire cult, and were possibly familiar with the notion of a Cosmic Man. In India, they met with similar beliefs and also with an advanced technology that included techniques for firing bricks. They adopted these techniques in the construction of a large fire altar for the Cosmic Man, piled up from fired bricks in the Indian manner, but with the addition of their own perforated stones. The Vedic nomads contrasted the naturalness of these stones with the artifacts of the sedentary civilization they encountered. Though they constructed the altar of the Agnicayana in the indigenous manner, the Vedic nomads continued to believe that the essence of the altar was already contained in their own naturally perforated stones.

Much of this picture is still speculative, but we shall see that there is evidence of a different kind that points in the same direction and is much more specific. This becomes clear as soon as we pay close attention to the role played by the naturally perforated stones in the construction of the Agnicayana altar. The Aṅgirasas provide a starting point. We have seen that the *ukhā* pot is prepared "in the manner of Aṅgiras." As we shall presently see, all the bricks are put down in this same manner. We have also seen that the Aṅgirasas might have been originally an indigenous tribe or family, perhaps priests of a fire cult. This implies in turn that the pre-Vedic Indians had their

PLATE 7A

Landscape with Perforated Rocks

The title of this painting is: "Forest Dwellings in the Chü Region" 具區林屋. The painter is Wang Meng 王蒙 (1308–1385), of the Yüan dynasty.

PLATE 7B

Sage in Front of a Perforated Rock

"Painting of a Lohan" 羅漢畫, by Ch'en Hung-shou 陳洪綬, a painter who lived during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). A Lohan (Sanskrit: *arhat*, "deserving") is a Buddhist sage, defined as a person "in whom the outflows of sense desire, becoming, ignorance, and wrong views have dried up, who has greatly lived, who has done what had to be done, who has shed the burden, who has won his aim, who is no longer bound to becoming, who is set free, having rightly come to know" (after Conze 1959, 93–94).

Collection of the National Palace Museum,
Taiwan, Republic of China.



A



B

PLATE 8A
Bodhidharma Inside a Cave

Bodhidharma introduced the Dhyāna (Meditation) School of Buddhism into China and became the First Patriarch of Ch'an (which in Japan developed into Zen). He practised what was known as wall contemplation, sitting in front of a wall, for nine years. He died in 535 A.D. Here he is depicted as the twenty-fifth of a series of twenty-five Buddhist dignitaries, associated with the Sūraṅgama Sūtra. The series is entitled: "The Twenty-five Perfected Buddhas of the Leng-yen Sutra" 楞嚴廿五圓通佛像. It was painted by Wu Pin 吳彬 (?1601-1643). The entire series is reproduced in Hu, 1977, Plates 041-1 through 041-25.

PLATE 8B
Perforated Rock in a Private Collection

The title is: "Painting of a Snow-wave Stone" 雪浪石圖, by the Ch'ing dynasty artist Chang Jo-ch'eng 張若澄 (eighteenth century). One of the inscriptions on the painting refers to a "snow-wave stone" mentioned by the celebrated eleventh century poet Su Tung-p'o. Chang Jo-ch'eng saw this stone in a private collection. When he met with it again, twenty years later, the characters 雪浪 Snow-Wave had been engraved on its surface. He made the painting to record this remarkable collector's piece.

Collection of the National Palace Museum,
Taiwan, Republic of China



PLATE 9
Peak of the Jade Maiden

“Drawing of the Peak of the Jade Maiden” 玉女峯圖, attributed to the painter Fan Huai-chen 范懷珍, who lived during the Southern Ch’i dynasty (479–502); but obviously of later date. The Jade Maiden mountain is one of several mountains that were famous among Taoists.

Collection of the National Palace Museum,
Taiwan, Republic of China

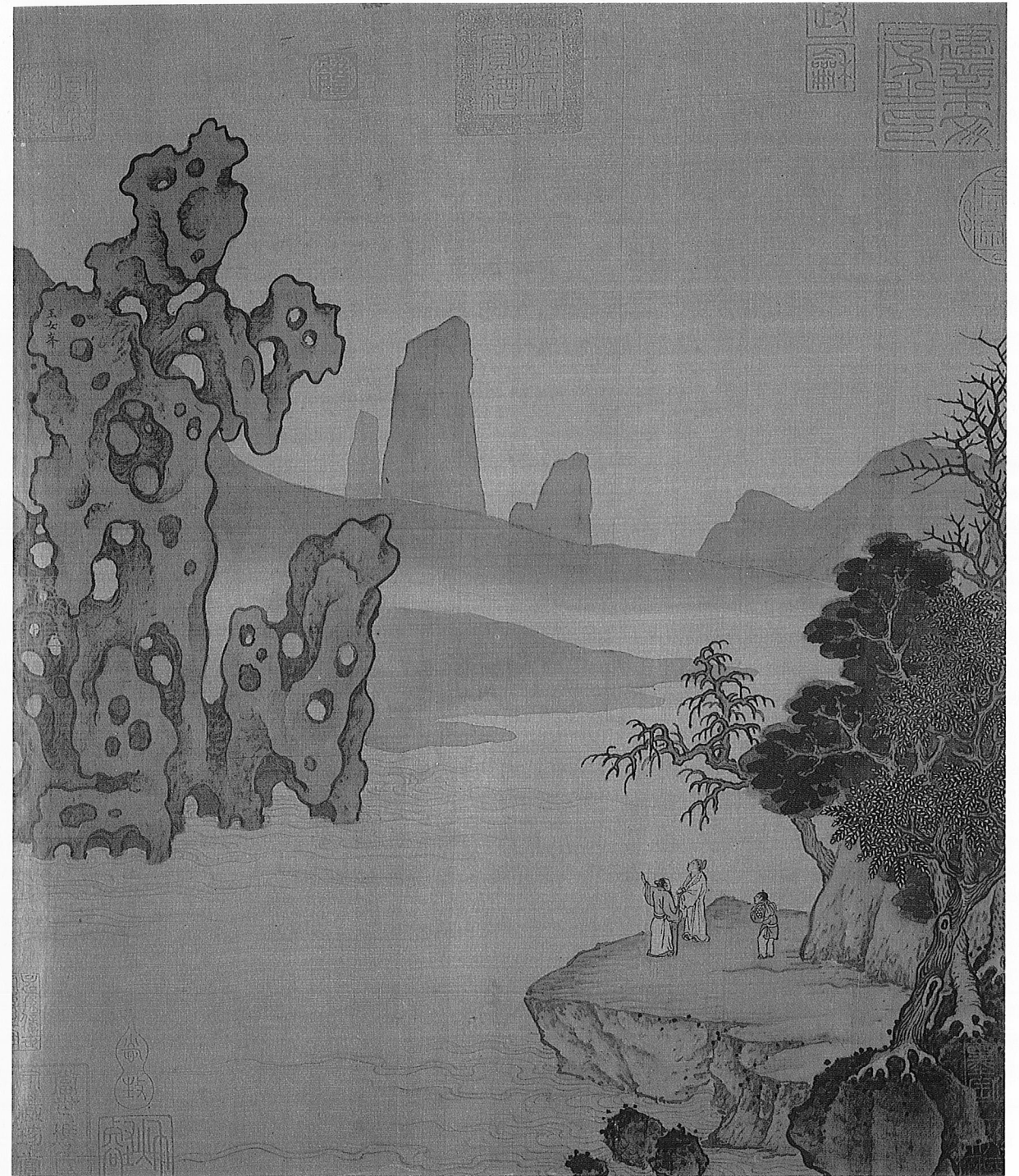


PLATE IOA

Perforated Rock in Lake Setting

The "Three Ponds Imprinted by the Moon" 三潭印月 are features of a small islet in the middle of the West Lake near Hangchow. Two great medieval poets, Po Chü-yi of the T'ang Dynasty and Su Tung-p'o of the Sung, as Governors of Hangchow, contributed to the development of scenic features of the West Lake. The pool-studded island on which this rock is set was built at the same time as "Su's Embankment" in the eleventh century.

PLATE IOB

Rock with Creeper Trained Through Perforations

In Soochow, ancient center of Chinese garden arts. The sixteenth-century garden to which this rock was brought from nearby Lake T'ai (T'aihu 太湖) was rebuilt in the late nineteenth century and renamed Liu-yuan 留園, "Dalliance Garden," as a pun on the family name of its owners, Liu 劉. T'aihu rocks of wave = worn limestone are a primary feature of Soochow garden landscapes.

Photographs Cyril Birch



A



B

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own fire cult. This, of course, is only to be expected. The people whose ancestors had built large cities from fired bricks, who fired their pottery, ate cooked food, and needed fire for heating (even if not to the same extent as is required in Central Asia) could not fail to be concerned with fire.

At this point we encounter a difficulty. There are no data from the Indus Valley Civilization that point in the direction of a fire cult. The Kalibangan excavation has yielded "a terracotta tub with traces of ash, a cylindrical stone in the center and some terracotta 'cakes' arranged around it" (Romila Thapar, personal communication; also Volume II, page 14). While this establishes the presence of fire, it does not establish the existence of a fire cult. There are plenty of hearths at every Indus site, but whether there are altars is uncertain. The Harappā seals are equally unhelpful which need not cause surprise. Even if the inscriptions on these seals are properly understood, they would give an extremely limited picture of a civilization somewhat like the picture that would emerge if all that were left of contemporary civilization was a collection of postage stamps. Such data are beautiful and interesting, but they only make sense if a great deal more is known. For this reason, our knowledge of the Indus Valley Civilization, even assuming that the inscriptions were all satisfactorily deciphered, is of quite a different order from our knowledge of the civilizations of the Near East, which left large libraries of clay tablets.

Another comparison may help to put the significance of the Indus Valley seals in proper perspective. As is well known, the decipherment by Champollion of Egyptian hieroglyphs was made possible primarily by the discovery of the Rosetta stone, which contained 14 lines of hieroglyphs together with translations into 32 lines of Demotic and 54 lines of Greek. The key to the decipherment was the occurrence of names in the three languages. In the hieroglyphic portion, each of these was clearly marked by being placed inside an oval outline. All of this is quite different from the situation in India. In the case of the Harappā seals, we have not found a Rosetta stone, and the over 2,000 seals that have so far been found correspond at best to the material inside the oval outlines of Egyptian hieroglyphic inscriptions.

It is clear that an Indus Valley cult of fire could easily fail to leave any traces in the archaeological data or on the Harappā seals. However, such a cult could not remain unnoticed in a large body of literature. Therefore, if we wish to find out about a possible cult of fire in the Indus Valley Civilization, positive evidence from similar cultures in the Near East would be more significant than negative evidence from the Indus valley itself. Fortunately, the relevant evidence has recently been collected by Jean Bottéro (1973). From this evidence we learn that the ancient Mesopotamians were still close to the period of fire collecting. Though the production of fire must have been known, there is no single verb that seems to refer to it. There are numerous references, however, to the preservation and transportation of fire. There were movable fire hearths, there are references to the use of fire in con-

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nection with pottery and brick making, and—last but not least—there were fire gods. The chief god of fire was called Gi-bil or Bil-gi (sometimes Giš-bar) in Sumerian, which corresponds to Girra, Gir(r)u in Akkadian. "This is the name of the God of Fire, or of deified fire, known since the period of Fara, around 2,600 B.C., or perhaps going back to 2,700 B.C. in the archaic archives of Ur. Gi-bil means 'burning reed' (Bottéro 1973, 10). There was also another fire god, called Nusku (ibid., p. 11).

From this evidence it would seem likely that a similar situation obtained in the Indus Valley Civilization. If this is the case, however, the Vedic nomads did not merely import a fire cult into the subcontinent; they must also have found a fire cult that was already there. What we would expect under such circumstances is that the two fire cults were combined. The Agnicayana preserves evidence that suggests precisely this.

There is a curious personage in the Agnicayana who acts as a priest, but is not found in other Vedic ritual (cf. Staal 1978; 1982, 42f.). He is called a brahmin, but he is *avidvas*, "ignorant." The term brahmin should not mislead us into supposing that this personage must be a Vedic Aryan. Aside from the Puruṣasūkta, brāhmaṇa occurs only twice in the R̥gveda, both occurrences in the hymn to the frogs, R̥gveda 7.103. In this context the term, used in the plural, refers to officiating priests (cf. Renou 1967, 150). It would be safe to assign it the same meaning in the expression "ignorant brahmin" in the context of the Agnicayana.

Like everything else that concerns the Agnicayana, the ignorant brahmin appears for the first time in the Yajurveda. The Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā (20.6: 24.10) refers to an "ignorant adhvaryu." The "ignorant brahmin" is found in several śrauta sūtras of the Black Yajurveda, but not in the White Yajurveda. Since the Black Yajurveda is older, this seems to indicate that his function was important and ancient. Yet soon thereafter, he was no longer understood and hence omitted.

Who is this ignorant brahmin who continues to be ignored? Weber did not meet him in the Agnicayana, since his description was based upon the Kātyayāna Śrauta Sūtra, which belongs to the White Yajurveda and therefore does not mention him. Caland discovered him in the Śrauta Sūtras of Baudhāyana and of Āpastamba, but even he declared: "The real significance of this 'ignorant' (i.e., perhaps unfamiliar with the cult of Agni) brahmin is not clear to me" [*die eigentliche Bedeutung des 'unwissenden' (d.h. wohl des mit dem Agniritus nicht vertrauten) Brahmanen ist mir nicht klar*: note 4 on Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra 16.23.1].

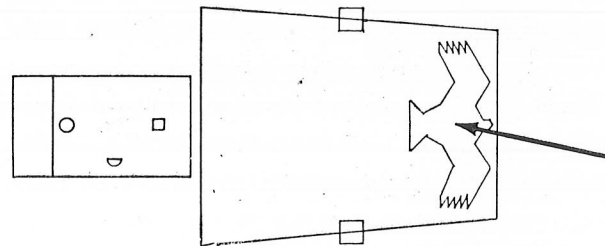
The ignorant brahmin appears thrice in the Agnicayana (cf. Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra 10.31:29.1; 10.39:37.17; 10.46:46.9–10; correspondingly Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra 16.23.1, 17.1.12, and 17.3.8; Mānava 6.1.7; Vārāha 2.1.6). He has to assist when the adhvaryu lays down the svayamātr̥ṇṇā in the first, third, and fifth layers of the bird-shaped offering altar. On the first occasion, the adhvaryu recites Taittiriya Saṃhitā 4.2.9.1b:

PLATE I I
The Ignorant Brahmin

“Earth!
Let Prajāpati seat you on the back of the earth,
you who are wide and extending.
You are the land,
you are earth, you are the ground.
You are Aditi, all sustaining,
supporter of the entire world . . .
With that god,
in the fashion of Aṅgiras,
Sit firm!”

(TS 4.2.9.1b)

The Ignorant Brahmin (on the right) assists adhvaryu (center) and yajamāna (left) with the consecration of the first naturally perforated pebble, which has three holes in it. It is hidden in the ground, below the center of the altar, which is marked by a peg. Some bricks of the first layer of the altar have already been put down, but only two bricks have been consecrated.



PART I THE AGNICAYANA RITUAL

Let the Lord of Creatures (Prajāpati) seat you
on the ridge of the earth,
you who are wide and extending.
You are broadness.
You are the earth. You are earth.
You are the ground.
You are Aditi all-sustaining, supporter of every being.
Hold fast the earth, make firm the earth, don't harm
the earth.
For every breath, for every exhalation,
for every diffused breath, for every inhalation,
for support, for motion!
Let Agni protect you with great welfare,
a safe cover!
With that god, in the fashion of Aṅgiras, sit firm!

प्रजापतिस्त्वा सादयतु पृथिव्याः पृष्ठे
व्यचस्वतीं प्रथस्वतीं प्रथोऽसि
पृथिव्यसि भूरसि भूमिरस्यदितिरसि
विश्वधाया विश्वस्य भुवनस्य धन्त्री
पृथिवीं यच्छ पृथिवीं दृष्टु
पृथिवीं मा हिंसीविश्वस्मै प्राणायोपानाय
व्यानायोपानाय प्रतिष्ठायै चरित्राय-
शिस्तवाऽभि पातु मूढा स्वस्त्या
छर्दिषा शन्तमेन तया देवतयाऽङ्गिरस्वद्
ध्रुवा सीद ॥

On the third layer, the adhvaryu recites Taittiriya Saṃhitā 4.3.6.2b:

Let the All-maker (Viśvakarman) seat you
on the ridge of the sky,
you who are wide and extending.
You are brilliant, sun-filled,
who shine on the land, in the wide sky.
Hold fast the sky, make firm the sky, don't harm the
sky.
For every breath, for every exhalation,
for every diffused breath, for every inhalation,
for support, for motion!
Let Vāyu protect you with great welfare,
a safe cover!
With that god, in the fashion of Aṅgiras, sit firm!

विश्वकर्मा त्वा सादयत्वन्तरिक्षस्य पृष्ठे
व्यचस्वतीं प्रथस्वतीं भास्वतीं सूरिमतीं-
मा या छां आसा पृथिवीमोर्वन्तरिक्ष-
मन्तरिक्षं यच्छान्तरिक्षं दृष्टु
न्तरिक्षं मा हिंसी-
विश्वस्मै प्राणायोपानाय
व्यानायोपानाय
प्रतिष्ठायै चरित्राय
वायुस्त्वाऽभि पातु
मूढा स्वस्त्या छर्दिषा शन्तमेन
तया देवतयाऽङ्गिरस्वद् ध्रुवा सीद ॥

On the fifth layer, the adhvaryu recites Taittiriya Saṃhitā 4.4.3.3 h:

Let the Supreme Being (Parameṣṭin) seat you
on the ridge of heaven,
you who are wide and extending.
You are strong, lordly, masterful.
Hold fast heaven, make firm heaven, don't harm heaven.
For every breath, for every exhalation,
for every diffused breath, for every inhalation,
for support, for motion!
Let Sūrya protect you with great welfare,
a safe cover!
With that god, in the fashion of Aṅgiras, sit firm!

परमेष्ठी त्वा सादयतु दिवः पृष्ठे
व्यचस्वतीं प्रथस्वतीं
विभूमेतीं प्रभूमेतीं परिभूमेतीं
दिवं यच्छ दिवं दृष्टु
दिवं मा हिंसी-
विश्वस्मै प्राणायोपानाय
व्यानायोपानाय प्रतिष्ठायै चरित्राय
सूर्यस्त्वाऽभि पातु मूढा
स्वस्त्या छर्दिषा शन्तमेन
तया देवतयाऽङ्गिरस्वद् ध्रुवा सीद ॥

There are obvious parallels between these three recitations (not brought out in Keith's translation). Let us consider them before we look at the differences. It is clear, first of all, that the three svayamātrṇṇā in the first, third, and fifth layers are made to correspond to the three worlds: earth, sky, and heaven. Furthermore, the identical refrain: "With that god, in the Aṅgiras

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manner, sit firm!" though referring to different deities, underlines that the svayamātrṇṇā have to be incorporated into the altar in the indigenous manner, viz., in accordance with the brick-piling techniques of the pre-Vedic Indians. This refrain, moreover, is repeated for each of the bricks of the entire altar, i.e., more than a thousand times. Since the refrain is the same as Taittiriya Saṃhitā 4.2.4.4.1, where "that god" refers to Agni, the reference for each brick is taken to be to Agni.

Another mantra is similarly repeated for each brick:

The spotted cattle, pouring out milk, mix his Soma.
At the birth of the gods, the tribes are in the three
bright vaults of the sky (Taittiriya Saṃhitā 4.2.4.4o =
Rgveda 8.69.3).

ता अंस्य सूदयोहसः
सोमं श्रीणन्ति पृथयः ।
जन्मन् देवानां विश-
स्त्रिणा रोचने दिवः ॥

The significance of this second mantra is not very clear. "His" Soma refers to Indra's Soma. The juice is mixed with milk. Cows are also related to bricks, because the bricks will turn into cows, and are therefore potentially cows. The bricks are wish bricks (see above, page 132). This mantra occurs also in the Great Litany (*mahad uktham*) of the Gavām Ayanam, "Cows' Walk," a satra ritual that lasts for a year and that incorporates an Agnicayana. In this ritual, the mantra is meant to represent the vital air pervading the bird-shaped body of Agni-Prajāpati (Eggeling 1897, IV, 110-112, notes). Whatever puzzles surround this second mantra, it clearly refers to Soma, just as the first mantra, through Aṅgiras, refers to Agni. The function of the two mantras taken together, therefore, seems clear: they relate each of the bricks of the pre-Vedic altar to the Vedic cult of Agni and Soma.

Now let us look at the differences between the three recitations of the adhvaryu. In each case, a *first* deity is asked to seat the svayamātrṇṇā; and a *second* deity is asked to protect it. The correspondence is as follows:

	FIRST DEITY	SECOND DEITY
1st svayamātrṇṇā (1st layer)	Prajāpati	Agni
2nd svayamātrṇṇā (3rd layer)	Viśvakarman	Vāyu
3rd svayamātrṇṇā (5th layer)	Parameṣṭin	Sūrya.

The deities of the second group, Agni (fire), Vāyu (wind), and Sūrya (sun), are clearly Vedic deities. They occur in the earliest parts of the Rgveda, and they are also Indo-Iranian. They are also basic notions in Shamanism (cf. Anisimov 1963, 210-215). Their connection with the three worlds is straightforward. They occur frequently in the ritual, for example, when the yajamāna, before the Animal Sacrifice for Vāyu, takes vows of Agni Lord of Vows, Vāyu Lord of Vows, and Āditya (= Sūrya) Lord of Vows (below, page 306). Here, the three are invoked in order to secure the svayamātrṇṇā within the realm of Vedic religion and culture.

The deities of the first group are invoked to incorporate the svayamā-

PART I THE AGNICAYANA RITUAL

tr̥ṇṇa into the altar, which is constructed in the indigenous manner. While they incorporate the Vedic svayamātṛṇṇā into the pre-Vedic culture, the Vedic deities of the second group are asked to endorse and support this. But the deities of the first group, in order to carry out their task, should obviously be indigenous deities themselves.

This is precisely what they are. Prajāpati occurs only a few times in the Ṛgveda, always in the tenth book, which is the most recent. He is not Indo-Iranian. Though he can be put together from Ṛgvedic pieces, as we have seen, he is identified with the Cosmic Man, who occurs also in the tenth book, and was quite possibly a deity of the pre-Vedic Indians. Viśvakarman, architect of the universe, fits into the same category. He is not Indo-Iranian, and is clearly related to the Cosmic Man. Though Viśvakarman is, in the earlier portions of the Ṛgveda, an epithet of Savitr̥, the solar force, he occurs as an independent deity only in the tenth book, and is later identified with Prajāpati. Parameṣṭin is not Indo-Iranian, and does not occur in the Ṛgveda at all. He is found only in the Atharvaveda and in the Brāhmaṇas, and is identified with Prajāpati and Agni.

The difference in character between the two kinds of deities is also apparent from their names. Agni, Vāyu, and Sūrya are real names of phenomena and of the gods manifest in those phenomena. But Prajāpati ("lord of creatures"), Viśvakarman ("all-maker"), and Parameṣṭin ("supreme being") are not names, they are functional descriptions. These descriptions are pure Vedic, as far as the language goes. Thus Viśvakarman was applied to Savitr̥. Later they became Vedic descriptions of non-Vedic gods who had their own non-Vedic names, which must have been unintelligible and barbaric sounding to the Vedic nomads. That the Vedic nomads should refer in such descriptive terms to non-Vedic gods is only natural. We do the same when we refer to the Aztec Sun God or the Japanese Lord of Heaven rather than to Huitzilopochtli or Ame-no-minaka-nushi.

Such a situation is of course not uncommon. There are, in fact, parallels from all over the world. The Egyptians met with many gods that were different from their own. Sometimes they identified them with Egyptian gods, as when they turned Asiatic gods into Hat-Hor or Seth. Later Asiatic and Semitic gods (e.g., Baal, Astarte) were worshipped in Egypt (A.J. Wilson in Pritchard 1955, 249–250). Such exchanges must have taken place between the Vedic nomads and the indigenous Indians, though we know only one side of the story.

It becomes intelligible, within this context, why the Vedic Indians asked whom they should worship with oblations? This question occurs at the end of each of the nine verses of Ṛgveda 10.121, another recent hymn. A tenth verse was added subsequently, and provides the answer: Prajāpati. Such questions do not express scepticism, as has been suggested. They express a real question that the Vedic nomads asked themselves: what is the identity of the pre-Vedic gods of the Indians? No wonder this same question occurs several

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times in the recitations that accompany typical episodes of the Agnicayana, such as the animal offering to Prajāpati at the beginning of the Agnicayana (TS 4.1.8), and the laying down of the golden man (TS 4.2.8.2 e).

The picture that emerges from the three recitations that accompany the putting down of the svayamātṛṇṇā expresses precisely the kind of synthesis between the two cults which we expected. Pre-Vedic deities are asked to incorporate Vedic cult objects into a pre-Vedic cult, and Vedic deities are asked to cooperate and endorse the operation. The brāhmaṇas that interpret these Taittirīya Saṃhitā mantras confirm this, specify it further, and enable us to solve the riddle of the ignorant brahmin.

The brāhmaṇas that explain the mantras of the first recitation are given in Taittirīya Saṃhitā 5.2.8.1–2. They explain the putting down of the svayamātṛṇṇā with the assistance of the ignorant brahmin in the following terms:

They say: *fire should be piled upon fire (agnāv agniś cetavyah)*. The brahmin is Agni Vaiśvānara. To him should he (i.e., the adhvaryu) hand the first brick prepared with the formula. The brahmin should deposit it together with the adhvaryu. In so doing he piles fire upon fire.

This puzzling passage is found only once. It does not recur in the brāhmaṇa portions that explain the mantras of the second and third recitations (which are given in Taittirīya Saṃhitā 5.3.2 and 5.3.7, respectively). What does it mean?

I can think of only one explanation that makes sense. The adhvaryu is the representative of the Vedic fire cult. The ignorant brahmin is the representative of the pre-Vedic Indian fire cult. He is ignorant in the eyes of the Vedic nomads, because he is ignorant of the Vedic fire cult (as Caland had correctly guessed). It would not be enough to say that, in this ceremony, cooperation between the two is essential. Rather, that cooperation is the essence of the ceremony. When he puts down the svayamātṛṇṇā, together with the adhvaryu, the ignorant brahmin "piles fire upon fire," i.e., he incorporates his own non-Vedic fire cult into the Vedic fire-cult of the adhvaryu. Though ignorant, he is a brahmin. He is accepted as such because he officiates as a priest in the fire cult. His assistance is essential because he is the connecting link between the two fire cults, and he exchanges gifts with the adhvaryu to seal this cooperation.

There are parallels to the phrase "piling of fire upon fire." Ṛgveda 1.12.6 and 8.43.14 (= Taittirīya Saṃhitā 1.4.46 1-m) refer to the kindling of fire by fire. In the ritual context, this is taken to refer to the lighting of the sacrificial fire from the domestic fire. Elsewhere, fire is offered in fire. This is mentioned, for example, in the context of the animal sacrifice. Animals are not eager to be slaughtered, but the gods convinced them that it is always in fire that sacrificial food is offered:

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Having, then, first secured the animals, and churned the fire, they offered fire into the fire (*agnāv agnim ajuhuvuḥ*), and then they (the animals) knew that this truly is the manner of sacrificial food, this is its resort, that it is truly in fire that sacrificial food is offered. And accordingly they resigned themselves, and became favorably disposed to the slaughtering (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 3.7.3.5, after Eggeling).

In this context, the offering of fire in fire makes sense. If fire is always the receptacle in which everything is offered, even fire itself is offered in fire, and this is presented as the most telling example that proves the case. But there is no connection here with the piling of fire upon fire in Taittirīya Saṃhitā 5.2.8.1–2, which cannot be explained in such a simple, straightforward manner.

We have seen that the Agnicayana might have been introduced into the Vedic fire cult through the intermediary of an indigenous priest class, the Āṅgirasas (see page 137). If this is true, it would seem likely that the ignorant brahmin was one of them. I know of no rules to that effect, and the gotra Āṅgirasa is not uncommon among the Nambudiris. Whatever its significance, the avidvān at the 1975 performance was a brahmin of the gotra Āṅgirasa (see below page 267).

It is possible that the avidvān should be related to the general class of priests of the Asuras or demon (asurya) priests, such as Viśvarūpa, Vṛtra, and Śukra (cf., e.g., O'Flaherty 1976, 98–99, 104–106, 120–122). I leave this for others to speculate, since we have yet to answer another question that is more germane to our investigation: why is the ignorant priest called Agni Vaiśvānara? Agni Vaiśvānara, "fire which is common to all men," is a common appellation of Agni from the R̥gveda onwards. This has been interpreted as referring to the sun or to the sacrificial fire. It has also been related to fertility (Heesterman 1957, 46–47). In the Brāhmaṇas, Agni Vaiśvānara is identified with the sun, with the year, and with all fires. Later, in the Upaniṣads, he is said to include the "fire of digestion," for the digestive processes of men are everywhere the same.

But who were "all men" to the Vedic nomads who had entered the Indian subcontinent, if not they themselves and the people they met with and who were already there? Agni Vaiśvānara therefore has a meaning that is quite specific: it denotes Agni who is common to the Vedic nomads and the pre-Vedic Indians. Both had their fire cults. The ignorant brahmin is introduced into the Vedic ritual because he represents the indigenous fire cult. Agni Vaiśvānara expresses the discovery by the nomadic invaders that the settled peoples they encountered also knew Agni. Agni, therefore, is intensely sought (*prṣṭa*) [see R̥gveda 1.98.2 = Taittirīya Saṃhitā 1.5.11.1 d (below page 342), etc. (Renou 1955–1967, XII, 98)].

We have almost come to the end of our story, a story that depicts the adventures of nomads who combined ideas they brought with them from

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Central Asia with practices and beliefs of the sedentary citizens of India. If it is true that the Vedic Indians were so deeply convinced of the value of perforated stones that they insisted that these be integrated into a pre-Vedic fire altar, why did they not look for similar stones in India? From what we know of these pebbles, they are generally found in or near rivers. On Indian soil, the Vedic nomads generally followed the course of rivers, and sometimes tried to cross them. We have seen (above, page 97) that their original eastward expansion was limited to the foothills west of the Gandak river, which is wide and difficult to cross. Here is a river on whose banks the Vedic Indians must have spent some time, with plenty of opportunity to look for perforated stones.

As it happens, the Gandak river—which the Greeks called *Kovδοχατης*, but which the Hindus derive from *gaṇḍaka*, "rhinoceros"—is primarily known in Hinduism because a special kind of perforated stone is found in it: the *śālagrāma*, which is sacred to Viṣṇu. These stones are generally black and contain fossil ammonite. They contain apertures or holes that are supposed to have been made by an insect called *vajrakīṭa*. They are called *chidra*, "pierced" (e.g., in the *Garuḍa* and *Padma Purāṇas*: Kirfel 1935, 168), like the *svayamātr̥ṇṇā*. The name of these stones derives from a village (*grāma*) called after the *śāla* tree (*Vatica robusta*: Kirfel 1935, 165); or else from a mountainous track of land on the Gandak river, called *Śālagrāma-kṣetra* (Venkatachalam 1958, 108; cf. also Bhardwaj 1973, 51). The main tributary of the Gandak river, the Kali Gandak, originates near the Tibetan border and flows south between the mountain massifs of Dhaulagiri and Annapurna. A little to the east of the river, in northern Nepal, lies Muktinath, a Hindu center of pilgrimage that is also associated with the worship of the *śālagrāma*. Downstream, in southern Nepal, several spots on the river are connected with the cult of Viṣṇu as *Nārāyaṇa*. A section of the Gandak river itself is called *Nārāyaṇī*.

The worship of the *Śālagrāma* is comparatively ancient. It is mentioned in Śaṅkara's *Vedānta Sūtra Bhāṣya* (eighth century A.D.) and in several *Purāṇas* (Kane 1941, II, 716). In the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* (with corresponding portions in other *Purāṇas*), the *Śālagrāma* cult is connected with the worship of Vāstu deities that play an important part in the foundation of a building. Chapter XLVI of this *purāṇa* gives a detailed description of a building with 81 rooms, placed in a diagram of nine by nine rooms. Different deities are placed in different squares or rooms, and in a particular order. Though very different in detail, the entire construction is not unlike that of the altar of the Agnicayana. Various forms of the *śālagrāma* are placed in this mystic diagram or *yantra*.

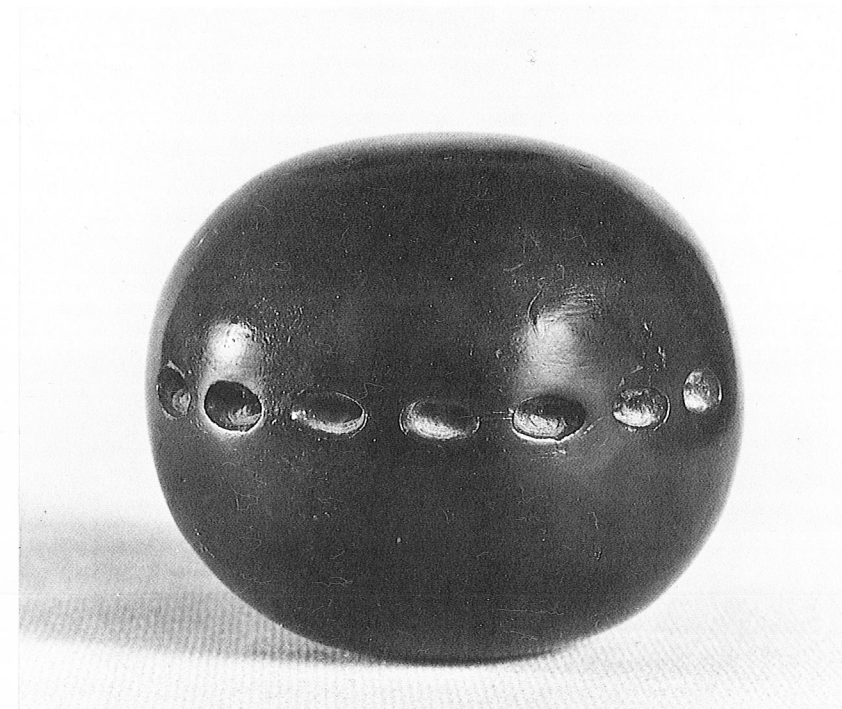
Venkatachalam (1958, 120) has drawn attention to some references to *śālagrāma* worship that may be earlier, but that I have not been able to trace. According to the *Viramitrodaya*, a late text, the *śālagrāma* is mentioned in the *Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra*, which Kane has dated between 600

PLATE 12

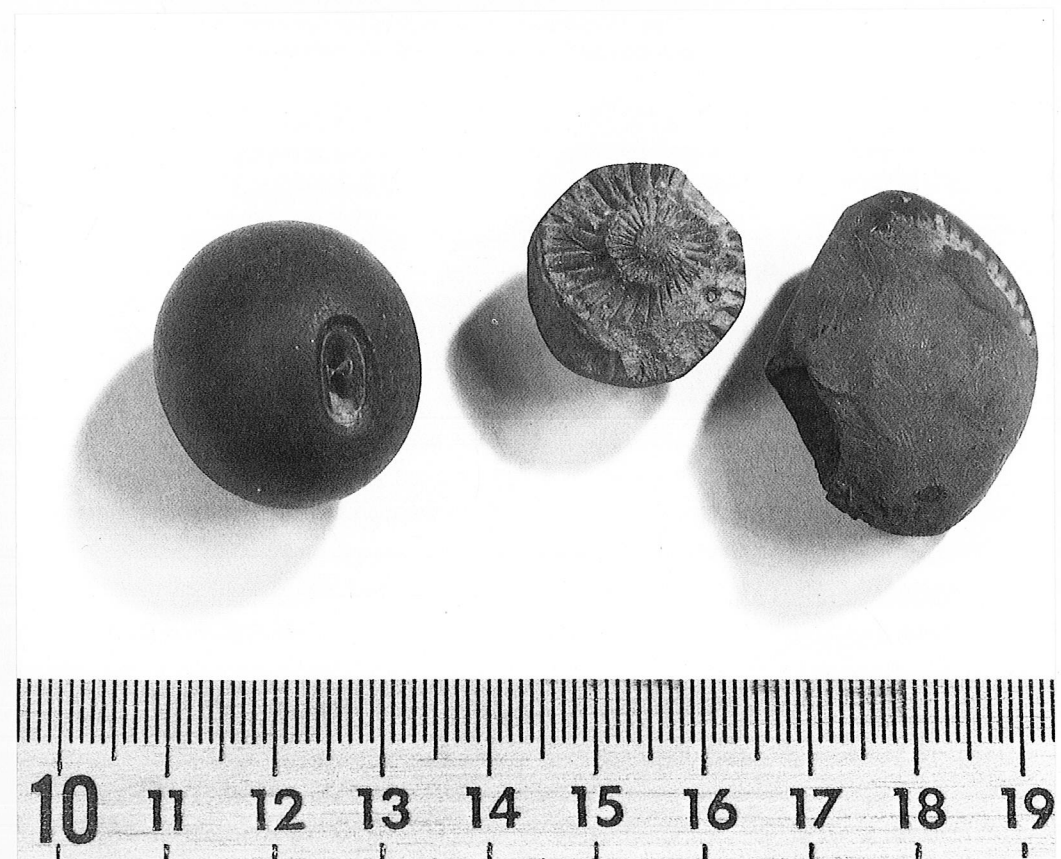
PLATE I2
Śālagrāma Stones

The Śālagrāma stone is sacred to Viṣṇu. It generally has holes in it and contains fossil ammonites. Originally, these stones were found in the Gandak river, the ancient Sadānīrā, which constituted a barrier to the eastward expansion of the Vedic Indians in the northern plains of the Ganges. The river originates in northern Nepal and joins the Ganges at Patna, the ancient Pāṭaliputra. There are many kinds of Śālagrāma that are distinguished by their names, often names of Viṣṇu or of vaiṣṇava attributes, e.g., Sanātana-gopāla, Sudarśana, etc. The stone on top is from the collection of Ajit Mookerjee, New Delhi. Below, in the center, a Sudarśana that is a cast of the umbilical area of an ammonite. The stone on the right shows parts of the ammonite itself, and a large hole on the left. Whether the stone on the left contains an ammonite or is artificial can only be ascertained by breaking it. Actually, holes could be produced in fossils through various causes. Rows of holes could be caused in fossils of ammonites or other animals by snail-like shells, for example, when mud did not fully enter the shell but left open spaces which came to the surface later when the fossil was exposed to wind or water. All these ammonites probably belong to the large family of *Perisphinctaceae*, which occurred worldwide. They come from the Jurassic formation, which is found in the Himalayas but not in the Indian plains. Scale in centimeters.

Photos John Webb
Michael Beaucage



A



B

PART I THE AGNICAYANA RITUAL

and 300 B.C. Venkatachalam also quotes a reference, in an *Āśvalāyana Grhya Sūtra Pariśiṣṭa*, to *svākṛti*, "having its own form," which has been explained as denoting such objects as Śiva's *liṅga* and Viṣṇu's *śālagrāma*. The term *svākṛti* expressed that these objects were not man-made artifacts, but originated spontaneously in nature, just like the *svayamātṛṇṇā* pebbles. Even at present, the sacred *rudrākṣa* beads (seeds of *Elaeocarpus ganitrus*) that are found naturally pierced for the insertion of a thread are preferred to those that have to be artificially pierced (Ghurye 1964, 92).

The cult of perforated stones in India is not confined to the *śālagrāma*. According to Crooke, who describes related beliefs in the popular religion and folklore of northern India, "The respect for these perforated stones rests on the well-known principle that looking through a stone which has a hole bored through it improves the sight" (Crooke 1896, II, 165). Crooke mentions parallels from other cultures, and relates perforated stones to beads, "whose efficacy is at the basis of the use of rosaries" (II, 19). Among their virtues are that they give sons, which reminds us of the beliefs of the natives of northern Hupeh, referred to in Tu Wan's catalogue of stones. The reason for this supernatural power is that the *śālagrāma* stones are themselves sons. The Purāṇas relate how the river goddess Gaṇḍakī engaged in ascetic exercises for many years, and was rewarded by Viṣṇu who took birth as her son in the form of *śālagrāma* stones (cf. Kirfel 1935, 165; Ruben 1939, 232). In Tantrism, lastly, similar stones are worshipped as representations of the vulva of the goddess.

If it is true that the *śālagrāma* cult of Hinduism is related to the *svayamātṛṇṇā* pebbles of the Agnicayana, the connections with Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa are not surprising, for we have seen that the Puruṣa of the Puruṣasūkta, which is also the Puruṣa of the Agnicayana, gradually merged with Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa in later Vedic literature (above, page 179). This is further confirmed by a Vaiṣṇava custom that continues to the present day: worshippers of Viṣṇu sip the water in which a *śālagrāma* has been washed to the recitation of the Puruṣasūkta (Gonda 1970, 205, note 36).

These scattered data show that the cult of perforated stones, which the Vedic nomads introduced into the Agnicayana ritual, has a widespread occurrence in Hinduism. It is not impossible that such cults existed in India at a much earlier date, for perforated stones have been found in Indus sites, but it is also possible that it originated when the Vedic Indians found perforated stones in the Gandak river similar to those that their ancestors had known in Central Asia.¹

¹ Unexpected confirmation of the hypothesis set forth in this section was provided by Mr. Ajit Mookerjee, who told me that *śālagrāma* stones are invariably placed in the foundation of temples in Bengal (which is the area the Vedic Indians reached after crossing both the Gandak and Ganges rivers). An especially large number of such stones occurs in the foundation of the terra cotta temple dedicated to Haṃseśvarī, the Goose Goddess, vehicle of Brahmā, in Bāṃsabeḍī, a suburb of Bandel (Chinsura District), north of Calcutta. For further discussion, see Staal 1982, 42–53.

Chapter 6. THE NAMBUDIRI TRADITION

A TIME SPAN of about two millenia separates the Vedic Indians from the Nambudiris, the Malayalam-speaking brahmins of Kerala. The difference in life-style, practices and beliefs between Vedic nomads and Nambudiri brahmins is almost total. Over the millenia, nothing has been left of the social structure of Vedic society and the ancient subdivision into classes (*varṇa*) of brahmins, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas, and śūdras. We know very little about the relations between the Vedic brahmins and the Nambudiri brahmins. In the mean time, the system of caste (*jāti*) based upon birth, with its multifarious subdivisions; its distinction between ritual purity and impurity; its emphasis on pollution, untouchability, and unapproachability has established itself all over India. In Kerala it assumed especially extreme forms. Ritual and caste remained such preponderant features of daily life, that Kerala has been called *karmabhūmi*, "land of ritual (activity)," or—in Vivekananda's words—"a madhouse of caste." At the same time, Hinduism has become the religion of the people, including the Nambudiris. As elsewhere in India, temple worship, pilgrimages, festivals, religious discourses, philosophical discussions, and all kinds of rituals are its main manifestations. While sectarianism—e.g., the development of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism—has never been strong in Kerala, temples dedicated to various forms and manifestations of Śiva, Viṣṇu, or the goddess (especially Bhagavatī) mark the countryside. The favorite form is probably Nārāyaṇa. In many of these temples, Nambudiri priests officiate.

In terms of caste and religious observances, the Nambudiri brahmins have remained orthodox until recently. Devoted to their rituals, Tantric as well as Vedic, from which outsiders are excluded, they were relatively unaffected by modern "English" education. Most Nambudiris have been settled and peaceful villagers, country aristocrats, small landowners, connoisseurs of literature and the traditional arts (especially Kathakaḷi), scholars, and gentlemen. If there is anything left of a nomadic nature, it is that the Nambudiris, especially the men, are constantly on the move visiting other Nambudiri houses, temples where a special occasion is being celebrated, or Kathakaḷis in which their favorite actors or musicians take part.

According to Anantha Krishna Iyer (1912, 170), the most conspicuous characteristics of the Nambudiris are simplicity and exclusiveness. Obviously, the former predicate does not extend to their rituals. As regards their life-style, the following description by a Tamil brahmin from Kerala, though not untainted by romanticism and nostalgia, still rings true:

Among the various peoples of the land the Nambūtirīs . . . occupy a privileged position. They have exerted a powerful influence